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THE

VISIONS OF JOHN IN PATMOS:

BEING

Notes on the Apocalypse.

BY

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"I AM . . . THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR."
Rev. xxii. 16.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following chapters, first issued in the *Christian Friend and Instructor*, have been carefully revised; an Introduction has been written, and a few notes added where any additional light has been received through subsequent consideration and study of the Scriptures. They are now commended to the Lord, from whom alone came the ability to write them, for His blessing, and to the careful attention of the reader. May He who closes the canon of inspiration with the announcement, "Surely I come quickly," produce in the hearts of both reader and writer the response, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is a great difference, carefully marked out in the Scriptures, between the ministry of John and that of Paul and Peter. That of Paul is stated in Colossians i., and had a twofold character, corresponding with the two Headships of Christ, as there given; viz., that of the gospel which was preached in the whole creation under heaven, flowing from Christ's pre-eminence in creation; and that of the church, the body of Christ, as connected with Him as its Head. The ministry of Peter, on the other hand, was confined to the circumcision; and, while he touches on the church as a spiritual house, which was being built up of believers as living stones on Christ as the Living Stone, he yet, as guided by the Holy Spirit, views believers in the character of pilgrims on their way, with Christ risen as their living hope, to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter i. 1–5.) But John holds a different place. He does not enter on dispensations; nor, though once or twice stating the fact (as xiii. 1, xiv. 1–3, xvii. 24, xx. 17), does he take the saint, nor even the Lord Himself, up to heaven. Jesus, for him, is a Divine Person, the Word made flesh mani-

festing God and His Father, eternal life come down to earth. In addition to this, another kind of ministry was committed to him, even if at the moment mysteriously, by the Lord after His resurrection, in the words addressed to Peter concerning John, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John xxi. 22.) For there can scarcely be a question that the book of Revelation is the fulfilment of the mission, for which he was thus designated.

It may be said, moreover, that a closer examination reveals an intimate connection between the last two chapters of his gospel and the Apocalypse. In chapter xx., in addition to the setting forth of the assembly as gathered with Christ Himself in the midst, there is the conversion of the Jewish remnant of a later day, typified by Thomas who believed when he saw. (See Zechariah xii. 10–13.) Chapter xxi. gives the gathering in of the nations in the millennium, shown in figure by the disciples letting down their net on the right side of the ship, at the command of the risen Christ, and not being able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. There are therefore three epochs in these chapters; that of the church, that of the conversion of the Jewish remnant, which will take place at the Lord's appearing, and that of the ingathering of the nations, after the kingdom has been established in power. The book of Revelation contains these three epochs, presented in a special way, after the vision of the Son of Man recorded in chapter i., together with the events in heaven and the judgments upon earth, which are connected with, and precede, the appearing of Christ, as the rightful Heir, to take His power, to make good in government all that God is, as revealed in relation to the earth, and to reign until all enemies are put under His feet. The eternal

state, in all its beauty and perfection, closes the subject of the book—that wondrous scene wherein God is all in all.

The reader will be the better prepared to study the book intelligently, if the special aspect in which the church is presented in it is considered. It was Paul's mission to unfold the truth of the church as the body of Christ, and as the habitation of God through the Spirit. (See, for example, Ephes. ii. and iii., in addition to Col. i., already cited.) "But John's ministerial testimony as to the assembly views it as the outward assembly on earth in its state of decay—Christ judging this—and the true assembly, the capital city and seat of God's government over the world, at the end, but in glory and grace. It is an abode, and where God dwells and the Lamb." In a word, the church as seen by John (Rev. i.–iii.) occupies *a candlestick position*, and is thus regarded as God's light-bearer, His responsible witness in the world. It is in this character that the church is subject to judgment and rejection, as recorded in chapters ii. and iii.

This may be a little more fully explained. Before Christianity, Judaism, Jerusalem as its expression in the kingdom, was God's candlestick, and this was symbolized by the seven-branched candlestick in the tabernacle and the temple. The prophet could therefore say to Israel, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord"; for they, and they only, were set as a testimony in the world to what God was as revealed to Israel. As the candlestick which God Himself had set up and lighted, Jerusalem was subject to judgment, and finally was publicly rejected. And there were four stages in this process of judgment and rejection. At the end of Matthew xxiii. the Lord passed sentence upon it, in the words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me hence-

forth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (*vv.* 38–39); and the following verse tells us that He "went out, and departed from the temple." The cross, in the next place, demonstrated that the Jews had rejected their God. The chief priests said, "We have no king but Cæsar." (John xix.) Still the long-suffering of God lingered; and the apostle Peter urged repentance on the nation, that their sins might be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord, and that Jesus Christ might be sent back to them. (Acts iii.) This new dealing of God with His people continued until Stephen; and then the nation rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost, even as they had that of Christ. It was now all over with the Jewish nation; and yet it was more than thirty years after this before God *publicly*, and in the face of the whole world, removed His candlestick by the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the "judicial end of Jewish history." And the point to be observed is this: that the responsibility of Jerusalem, as God's candlestick, remained until she was judicially and publicly removed. As another has said: "Jerusalem was the seat of God's testimony. His candlestick had been there. I need not insist amongst Christians that the light and the presence of God were spiritually dwelling in the midst of Christians. *Nevertheless, Jerusalem's responsibility and her position before the world only ceased in her destruction by the judgment of God.* After this, God's candlestick, in a terrestrial sense, was in the professing church. Till then, Christians had been, to the eye of the world, a sect of the Jews."*

The application of these principles to the church, as God's vessel of testimony in the world, is evident. In this

* *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. v. p. 14.

character, as is plainly seen from Rev. i. where Christ is viewed as Son of man in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and from the threat to remove the candlestick of Ephesus, unless there should be repentance, the church is come into the place of Jerusalem as God's light-bearer in the world. And as occupying this position, she is judged, and the final sentence is recorded in chapter iii., in the letter to Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." But, as in the case of Jerusalem, there may be several stages in the execution of the sentence. When the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, He totally rejects the outward professing thing as His witness; but its responsibility will remain as long as it occupies the place of profession before the world. There may be therefore, as with Jerusalem, some public visitation of judgment which will be seen to be the setting aside for ever, as His witness, of that which had borne the name of Christ.

If the reader has at all comprehended the candlestick aspect of the church, as now described, it will immensely facilitate his understanding of the first three chapters of Revelation, and, at the same time, save him from being carried away by the many erroneous teachings abroad on this portion of the Scriptures.

A word or two may be added, though the subject is dealt with also in the text, on the question of the angels. As everywhere, in accordance with the symbolism, the stars set forth subordinate authority; thus the sun is supreme, the moon derived, and the stars subordinate authority. (See Genesis i. 16; Psalm cxxxvi. 9.) They are also light-bearers, and as such are set by God Himself in the firmament of heaven. To bear these features in mind will aid in the interpretation of the symbol as applied to the angels of the churches. First, they are, then, God's

representatives in the church, not the church's representatives before God; they are there to rule for Him, and, while the church, as we have seen, is to be a light-bearer to the world, the stars (the angels) are to give light in the church. It is as God's (Christ's) representatives that He holds them, as seen in chaps. ii and iii., responsible for the state of the assembly.

The question whether an angel sets forth an individual or a number is easily answered. These seven churches represent church states; for example, Ephesus describes the state of the church after the death of the apostles; and bearing this in mind, it would be idle to speak of an angel in the whole church standing for a single person. That there was the actual assembly at Ephesus is not forgotten; only the fact of its being the representative of the condition of the whole church shows the impossibility of interpreting the symbol of one person. From the meaning of it, as given above, an angel describes all, in any phase of the church depicted under the seven churches, whether few or many, who occupy the place of light-giving and authority in the assembly.

The bearing of this interpretation of the angels will be readily apprehended. If they are God's representatives, it is their state that is dealt with, and with their state as responsible before God for the assembly. It must, however, be remembered that the state of the church is largely determined by the state of the stars; for those that give light, teach, and those that rule, possess the formative power. Hence it is that the instruction in these letters is for all who have ears to hear, and to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. The address to the angel of Thyatira, for example, contains at least four classes. There is, first of all, the angel to whom it is sent. Jezebel

is next introduced; and it should be distinctly noted that the angel is blamed for the allowance of Jezebel, and for the introduction of her teaching—the beginnings of the Romish systematized error; there is the faithful remnant; and, last of all, there is the overcomer. What we desire to lay stress upon is, that Jezebel represents the Papal system, and that the Lord held the angel responsible for its appearance and establishment. In like manner, as to Sardis, it is the angel that has fallen into the state described, is held responsible, and is called upon to repent. But on the very principle affirmed, that the angel possesses formative power, he becomes the expression of an almost general state of things. We say "almost general," because an exception is made in the words, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments."

The rest of the book is explained, according to the light given, in the order of the chapters; and if the reader does but weigh the statements made, and compare them with the teaching of Scripture, remembering, at the same time, that the Holy Spirit alone can effectually convey the mind of God, and open our hearts to receive it, he will certainly be led into the understanding, if in measure, of the important contents of this portion of the inspired volume.

THE APOCALYPSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE VISION OF JOHN.

BEFORE entering upon a consideration of the epistles to the seven churches, the vision in which John received his commission must necessarily, if briefly, occupy our attention. First, however, it may be pointed out, as bearing on the nature of the book, that God Himself is the source of all the communications it contains. It is "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass*"; and then, as we read, "*He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.*" (*v.* 1.) The following words will explain the significance of these expressions: "The revelation is one belonging to Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, and He signifies it to John. Though God over all, blessed for ever, He is here seen as Son of man, the rejected Messiah or Lamb, and so Head over all things. The fact that the revelation is one confided to Him is important, because it at once makes it the testimony of Jesus, and the word of God, being communicated by Jesus, and given to Him by God. This testimony of Jesus and the word of God comes as a vision to John, who bare record of all he saw."

After this description of the nature of the book, the Spirit of God, in whose power John bears record, pauses, before proceeding, to pronounce a special blessing upon him that reads, and upon those that "*hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*" (*v.* 3.) Thereby we are warned against allowing this book to fall into neglect, and encouraged by the promised blessing to read, and to treasure up its divine words in our hearts, and the more in that the time is at hand when all will be fulfilled. The pure light of this prophecy shines out upon the darkness of this evil day, to show the path of God's people, as well as to indicate the future both of the Church and the world, while awaiting the Lord's return.

John, in the next place, commences his address "*to the seven churches which are in Asia,*" and, first of all, sends to them the message of grace and peace, yet not, as in the Pauline epistles, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (and this will teach the reader the character of the ground John here occupies), but from Him who is, and was, and is to come. This expresses God in His absolute existence, the "I am," but as connected, or rather identified, with the One who had revealed himself in previous ages, even to the patriarchs and to the saints of old, and who, as the coming One, would make good on the earth all that He was as so revealed. It is also "*from the seven Spirits which are before the throne,*" not now the Holy Ghost dwelling in the Church on earth, but the Spirit in the plenitude of His power, and hence sevenfold, and before the throne, because connected with the government of the earth. Lastly, it is from "*Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.*" (*v.* 5.) This comprehensive presenta-

tion of Christ is all in relation to the earth, for, as the "faithful witness," it is what He was down here for God; as the "first-begotten of the dead" it is rather the character in which He will take His power and kingdom; while "the prince of the kings of the earth" exhibits His title about to be made good in actual and universal sovereignty. But no sooner is Christ thus brought before the soul of John than, speaking on behalf of all the saints, his heart overflows, as wrought upon, inspired, and taught by the Holy Spirit, in strains of adoration, "*Unto Him that loved* us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings† and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*" In this utterance of praise, John represents the first redeemed company (the saints of this period) found in this book, but the saints rather as associated with Christ in the kingdom; and, speaking as their mouthpiece, he celebrates the eternal love of Christ—that love which led him to give Himself for us, to cleanse us from our guilt through the efficacy of His precious blood, and to associate us with Himself in His own royal priesthood. John concludes with an ascription of glory and dominion which, raised on earth, will be sung for ever, and as fittingly when we are for ever with the Lord as now upon the earth. The song is eternal in its character.

In the following verse (7) the appearing of Christ, His coming in the clouds of heaven, with its effects, is announced, and it is closed with the response, "*Even so, Amen*" (compare xxii. 20); and thereon we have the solemn affirmation of what God is, "*I am Alpha and*

* It is now generally accepted that "loves" is the correct reading.

† Or, "a kingdom."

Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." (*v.* 8.) "We here find what is so remarkable in John—the mixing up of God and Christ. Verse 8 cannot be said to be one or the other. It is Christ; but it is Christ, Jehovah, Almighty, the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come; the first and the last." (Compare chap. xxii. 12, 13.) It is the infinite One, who sums up, comprehends all existence, whether past, present, or future, in His own being; the Almighty, whose power will be displayed in the future as it has been in the past and the present; and He is Christ the Lord.

First, then, we have the saints of this dispensation; afterwards the appearing of Christ, and the One who appears is none other than Jehovah, the Almighty. This is, as another has pointed out, "the complete circle of John's position, from John's day to the end."

John now proceeds to give his own circumstances: "*I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*" (*v.* 9.) Apostle though he was, as also the beloved disciple who had been permitted to recline his head on Jesu's breast, he yet, in the true spirit of humility, only styles himself the "brother" of the saints, and their "companion" in the tribulation which was the lot of all the faithful. In consonance, moreover, with the character of his ministry, as here recorded, he takes up the position of being in the kingdom, and hence also in the "patience of Jesus Christ"; for if Christ waits patiently until His enemies are put under His feet, John, if in fellowship with his Lord, must also wait. But he is withal a prisoner, an exile on account of

his fidelity in preaching the word of God, and in proclaiming the testimony of Jesus Christ. Had Satan then succeeded in stifling the voice of this courageous witness? So it might have appeared even to despondent saints. Not so, however; for Satan, in stirring up this persecution, was but blindly accomplishing the divine will. God had now other work for John, work that required the servant to be in solitude for a season; and He thus allowed him to be banished to this lonely spot, where, undistracted by other voices, or by his daily service among the saints, and alone with God, he could, in undisturbed communion, become the channel of these divine messages to the assemblies. Torn away by human authority from his beloved service among the churches, he became thus, through the Spirit, their instructor down to the end. In this sense he tarries on earth until the Lord's return. (John xx. 22.)

So far all is introductory. The vision in which he is instructed as to his service follows. The day on which it took place was the Lord's-day—the day which all Christians know by that name.* We state the significance of this fact in the language of another: "In the day of resurrection—his own place—the day on which Christians meet, the apostle, removed from the society of Christians, still enjoyed the special elevating power of the Holy Ghost, though alone." For, indeed, he became "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day*"; *i.e.*, he was so possessed with the power of the Spirit, that the Spirit, for the time being, so completely controlled the vessel that John would be unconscious of bodily existence. In this state he enjoyed

* It would not be for profit to enter upon the discussions which have been raised on this point. The conclusion given above will commend itself to every simple soul.

fully the opened ear and the anointed eye, and was thus divinely qualified for the mission to which he was now to be called. Accordingly he tells us: "*I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying,* [*I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and*]* *What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*" (*vv.* 10, 11.) This is his commission in its general character; and John instantly responds to the divine command thus received; for he says, "*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.*" It is another illustration of what is so often seen in the prophetic books; viz., that He who commands His servants Himself bestows the power for the execution of His word. Having turned, the vision is unfolded to his spiritual gaze; and the first thing that attracted his attention was "*seven golden candlesticks.*" (*v.* 12.)† The Lord Himself afterwards explains the meaning of this symbol, thus giving the key to its interpretation, "*The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*" (*v.* 20.) This shows at once that these seven churches are taken as representative of the whole church, and of the church during its whole history upon earth. The state of seven existing churches is portrayed to exhibit the commencement of the decline of the church, as in Ephesus, and its increasing corruption, onward to its rejection, as the vessel of testimony on the earth, as in Laodicea. This will be more fully developed when we enter upon the consideration of the churches

* The words enclosed in brackets are omitted in the best MSS.

† Some translate "lamps," others "lampstands." It is the same word in Hebrews ix. 2, used of the seven branched golden candlestick in the tabernacle.

themselves; but it should be now observed, that it is therefore plain that the church is not here regarded as the body of Christ, nor even as the house of God; but rather in its responsibility as God's witness-bearer upon the earth, and as such subject to judgment and rejection in this character even as Israel of old. The following remarks may aid the reader to seize more intelligently this aspect of the church: "These churches are seen as distinct light-bearers; that is, in their place of service, or rather position of witness in the world. They are viewed in their own proper character as of God; as set by Him in the world, they are of gold; He may take them away because they give a dim, or no true light or witness for God; but the thing taken away was founded in divine righteousness, and founded originally by a divine hand."*

But it is with Him who is standing in the midst that the Spirit of God is chiefly occupied: "*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" (*vv.* 13–16.)

Three things in this description have to be noted—the character in which Christ is here seen; His attributes as set forth by the various features of His appearance; and, lastly, what has been aptly termed His "official supremacy," as betokened by His holding in His right hand the seven

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible.* Vol. v. p. 571.

stars, &c. First, then, He is seen, though in relationship —the relationship here described—to the churches, as Son of man. This is undoubtedly because He has here assumed a judicial aspect. (Compare John v. 27.) Hence He is seen "in the wide character in which He is set over all the works of God's hands, and Heir of all the promises and purposes of God to man, according to divine righteousness." But as Son of man He is not actively engaged in service, for His garment is ungirded, though He has on the girdle of divine righteousness. At the moment He is surveying, and judging, rather than serving.

Next come the different traits of His appearance.* First, "His head and His hairs were white as wool." This plainly identifies Him with the "Ancient of days" in Daniel vii. 9; and this will enable the reader at once to understand how different the character He here takes from those relationships of grace to His people as set forth in the epistles. Thus in this chapter, as we have seen, Jesus Christ is Himself Jehovah, and the Son of man is the "Ancient of days." All divine glory therefore is displayed in Him who was once the humbled Christ. For the remaining features we again transcribe the remarks of another: "But in this glory He has the attributes of judgment—eyes of fire, that which pierces into everything, and fire is ever the sign of judgment. This was its piercing, searching character; His feet, the firmness with which sin was met; for brass is righteousness, viewed, not as intrinsically in God to be approached, but as dealing with man in his responsibility as man. The mercy-seat was gold, the altar and laver brass; but there it was as an altar; that is, dealing with sin for man. A sacrifice

* As a contrast let the reader ponder the description given in the Song of Solomon v. 10–16.

through fire was there, but here the burning furnace of judgment. The voice was the sign of power and majesty."* Lastly, His official supremacy is pourtrayed. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches† (*v.* 20), and these the Son of man holds in His right hand. Stars are commonly in the Scriptures the emblem of those in subordinate authority, and such were the angels of the churches; and we learn therefore that in the church, as set up in divine order by God Himself, the Lord upholds those in responsibility in His right hand; that is, by His own divine power. The two-edged sword represents the piercing, searching character of the Word in judgment (see Hebrews iv. 12); and we are thus recalled to the fact that Christ as Son of man tests, judges, everything in the midst of His people, as to their state and ways, by His own infallible word. Then, last of all, His countenance was "as the sun shineth in his strength"—that is, He possesses the supreme authority—for it is this the sun as a symbol indicates. (Compare Matthew xxiv., Revelation xii.)

The effect on John of the unwonted appearance of Him whom he had known in the days of His sojourn on earth, whom he had seen as transfigured on the mount, and whom he had often beheld after His resurrection, was that he "*fell at His feet as dead.*" (Compare Isaiah vi., Daniel viii. 15–17, &c.) It is therefore to reassure His servant, as well as to sustain him, that, as John tells us, "*He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the*

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible.* Vol. v. p. 571.

† We leave further discussion as to the meaning of the term "angels" until we come to the letter to Ephesus.

keys of hell and of death." (*vv.* 17, 18.) If therefore the One John saw in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks was Jehovah, the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, He was also the One who had tabernacled amongst men, the lowly Jesus; He who had been crucified, but had risen out of death in the power of an endless life, and had, in virtue of the work wrought out on the cross, become the possessor of the keys of hades and of death. In a word, He was the risen Redeemer, who now wielded sway over the whole realm of death and Satan's power.

Such was the glorious Personage who presented Himself to His servant John, and who commissioned him to record, first, "*the things which thou hast seen*"—that is, the vision which had been displayed before his eyes; secondly, "*the things which are*"—viz., the things relating to the whole Church period, as found in chapters ii. and iii.; and, thirdly, "*the things which shall be hereafter*," or the things that shall be after these; that is, after the church period, as found recorded in the rest of the book. Then, last of all, an explanation is given (already considered) of the symbols of the seven stars, or the seven candlesticks, John had seen in the vision. This is the close of the introductory vision, which, when understood, gives the key to the interpretation of the communications made to the seven churches.

CHAPTER II.

(1) THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS.

(*vv.* 1–7.)

THIS is the first of the seven assemblies to which John was directed to write through its angel. This assembly occupies a very important place in the New Testament scriptures. Both Paul and Apollos laboured in that city (Acts xviii. 18–28); and it was Paul who afterwards baptized the disciples there in the name of the Lord Jesus, when, moreover, on the laying on of his hands upon them, they received the Holy Ghost. It was at Ephesus also that the apostle seems first to have separated "the disciples" from the unbelieving Jews, and where the preaching of the Word was accompanied by special displays of divine power, which awakened the bitter and violent opposition of the adversary. (See Acts xix.) The free activity of Paul, as the apostle of the Gentiles, was closed too by his remarkable address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, in which he warned them of the perils that awaited them after his departure from the entering in among them of "grievous wolves," who would not spare the flock; and from men, who would arise out of their own midst, "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them," and in which, at the same time, he cast them, and through them believers of all ages, upon God and the word of His grace as their unfailing resource in all their dangers and need. (Acts xx. 17–38.) Lastly, it was to the assembly at Ephesus that Paul was commissioned to write

that wondrous epistle wherein he, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, "gives the richest exposition of the blessings of the saints individually, and of the assembly, setting forth at the same time the counsels of God with regard to the glory of Christ." It will be instructive to remark, that if the assembly at that time had not been characterized by the power of the Holy Ghost in life, service, and testimony, she could not have received these exalted communications.

The reader will observe that John is enjoined to write, not exactly to the church, but "*unto the angel of the church of Ephesus.*" Two things must therefore be considered before the letter itself occupies our attention—the meaning of the term "angel," and the period of the church's history indicated.

1. The angel of the church. The significance of this appellation must be gathered from the use of the symbolism of the star in scripture. A star, or stars, as may be gathered from chap. xii. 1–4 in this book, will mean subordinate authority; and we read expressly in Psalm cxxxvi., "The moon and stars to rule by night." (*v.* 9.) And comparing this passage with Genesis i. 16, it is evident, as pointed out in the Introduction, that the sun sets forth supreme, the moon derived, and the stars subordinate authority. Now "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1), and this is true of the church, as of the kingdoms of the world; and hence it is that Christ had the seven stars in His right hand. The angels therefore of the churches, as symbolised by the stars, signify those whom God has set in the church for light-giving and for rule, and as such they are His representatives. It is on this account that the Lord holds them responsible for the state of the assembly, that He addresses them in these letters, and gives to them rebuke

or commendation according to their condition. Sometimes a faithful remnant is distinguished from the angel as in Thyatira, and sometimes, as in Smyrna, where there was nothing to blame, the angel and the saints can be addressed interchangeably. But it is the angel who is held to be responsible, and for the reason that it is those who give light (teach), and those who rule, who form the state of the assembly, and it is these who are represented by the angel. It must not be, however, for one moment forgotten that the assembly itself is likewise responsible; that all who compose it are accountable for their, and the assembly's, spiritual state. Three considerations will explain this. In verse 5, though the angel of Ephesus is addressed, the term "thy candlestick" is used, when manifestly it is the candlestick of the assembly; secondly, the proclamation is made in verse 7, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith *unto the churches*"; and thirdly, there is the promise to the individual overcomer. On these grounds, therefore, we have not hesitated in our remarks to speak of the assembly's condition and responsibility, as well as that of the angel. The same thing is found in the history of the kingdom. God held the kings as responsible for the state of the people; but, as the addresses of the prophets show, He did not, on this account, absolve the people from guilt. Still the kings, as the angels, were those who were set in responsibility as God's representatives.

2. The period indicated must also be considered. It seems well established that John must have written the book of Revelation about the close of the first century, the year 95 or 96 A.D. being that generally determined. It was therefore at the close of what may be termed "the apostolic period." But the nature of these communications

must also be remembered. This letter was sent to the angel of an actually existent assembly—an assembly, moreover, typical of the state of the whole church immediately following upon the days of the apostles, and perhaps also prophetical of certain phases of the life of the churches down to the end. It is quite true that only the last four of these seven churches go on to the close, and that the first three are successional, and represent successive states; still, it is never to be forgotten that every one of these letters contain instruction for all time—first for the church, and then in principle for the individual. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever"; and we are justified therefore in insisting on this threefold application; viz., to the state of the assembly at Ephesus; to the state of the whole church as set forth by that local assembly; and lastly, to any assembly or individual at any period whose state might correspond with that here depicted. At the same time the angel of Ephesus undoubtedly represents the condition into which the church fell immediately after the departure of the apostles.

Following upon the address of the letter, we have the character in which Christ presents Himself to the angel of the assembly: "*These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*" (*v.* 1.) In some of the letters there is a connection between the character of the presentation of Christ and the state of the assembly addressed. Here it is simply the general character in which He is seen in relation to the whole church in the previous chapter. He is the One that holds in His right hand of power the seven stars, those who are in the place of responsibility before Him for the assembly, and who

now walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks to survey their condition, to test their state by His word, which is as a sharp two-edged sword, and to judge their character as His responsible light-bearers amid the moral darkness of this world. We thus learn that to occupy the place of rule or responsibility among the saints *for Christ according to God*, is to call in all the sustaining power of Christ; and, secondly, that in estimating the state of an assembly as a witness-bearer, the Lord judges according to His own infallible standard of holiness. An unfaithful witness ceases to give a testimony that Christ can accept. What a solemn warning is hereby conveyed to His people in every age!

In the next two verses we have the general state of the angel of the church at Ephesus. "*I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*"* (*vv.* 2, 3.) The first expression, found also in the succeeding letters, conveys the fact that the Lord ever beholds the condition of His people, that their state and activities are ever before, and examined by, His eyes. This follows from the position He here takes as walking in the midst of the candlesticks. It is well to recall this, for often there is a temptation, to close up questions, or even to cover up sin, in the assembly to prevent discussions, or for the sake of peace, regarding the faces of men more than the fact that Christ searches into everything with His eyes as a flame of fire. "All things are naked and opened

* The reading more generally adopted is: "Thou hast patience, and hast borne for my name's sake, and hast not wearied."

unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. iv. 13.)

Then, after the statement of His general knowledge, follow the details of the condition of this assembly. And what a record it is! There had been activity and suffering ("endurance"), there had been the faithful exercise of discipline; moral and doctrinal evil had been alike refused and abhorred; they had endured, and had borne, and for the name of Christ they had been unwearying in labour. Suppose now the record had gone no further, would it not be said, Here is the exhibition of a perfect assembly! What assembly to-day could compare with this picture? Ah, it is indeed profitable to hold up the mirror of God's word before ourselves, that, wherever there are the twos and threes gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they may discover their real condition, and challenge it, by the light of such a description as this.

But the point is, Possessing all these admirable characteristics, characteristics which would abundantly satisfy man, was Christ satisfied? He proceeds, "*Nevertheless I have* against thee, because† thou hast left thy first love.*" (*v.* 4.) "Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency; but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone"; and, as we find everywhere in the Scriptures, nothing can compensate for want of heart for Christ. It is this indeed that He ever looks for from His own, being, as He is, exceedingly jealous of the affections of His Bride. The first love is that absorption of heart with Christ which is ever produced by an overwhelming sense of His grace

* The introduction of the word "somewhat" is unnecessary, and unduly softens down the point of the Lord's complaint.

† Better translated "that."

and love in redemption. It is touchingly alluded to by Jehovah through the prophet, when pleading with His people on account of their backslidden condition. He says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer. ii. 2.) So, in dealing with this assembly, the Lord recalls her first love—a love that displays itself in the happiness begotten by the knowledge of His love, in that holy ardour and devotedness of which His love is the only motive (compare 2 Cor. v. 14, 15)—and, mourning over its absence, warns her that He cannot pass it over. Let every assembly, then, throughout the land lay to heart these pleading, solemn words. Let all be on their faces before God with searching self-judgment, as they confess the truth of this indictment, and seek the needed grace for the recovery of this priceless blessing, this "first love," which alone can satisfy the heart of Christ.

Exhortation and warning follow. "*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly,* and will remove thy candlestick† out of his place, except thou repent.*" A principle of the first importance, constantly affirmed in the Word, is contained in the first clause; viz., that to discover the character of our failure, or the extent of our backsliding or departure from the truth, we must ever go back to the commencement. For example, the state of the church to-day can only be truly discerned when com-

* The word "quickly" is of doubtful authority.

† This term may again be noticed, The Lord says to the angel, "*Thy* candlestick," and yet it is Ephesus that is the light-bearer. The church must therefore be addressed through the angel, and for the reason that the state of the one is generally the state of the other. This must be borne in mind in reading these comments.

pared, or rather contrasted, with what it was when first founded at Pentecost. Ephesus in like manner must remember *whence* she has fallen, as only then could she gauge the extent of her failure. Together with this there must be, or, we might more accurately say, there would be, repentance; for once discovering, by grace, the depth of our fall, self-judgment, viewing our condition as the Lord Himself sees it, and contritely owning it, would necessarily follow. Then, moreover, the "first works" may be done, inasmuch as when we have taken our true place before God in real humiliation, He can again work mightily through His people to bring them back to their "first love," from which their "first works" alone can proceed. Unless therefore the, or, we may say, *an* assembly regains heart for Christ, there cannot be a true testimony for Him in the energy of the Spirit through her first works. There may be faith, but though it were faith that could remove mountains, and there were not also charity (love), it would be nothing; there might be also unceasing labours of philanthropy, but these without love would not profit. (See 1 Cor. xiii.) Without the first love therefore the church will utterly fail to be a transcript in any measure of the heart of Christ, as well as of the grace of God, before the world. Hence the solemn warning that the Lord was coming to Ephesus, and would remove her candlestick out of its place, unless she repented. We say unless *she* repented, but it must be borne in mind that, in accordance with the true position of the angel, the work of self-judgment and recovery must commence with those whom God holds as His representatives.

The reader will remember that this warning has no reference whatever to the question of individual salvation, that it concerns entirely the church as God's light-bearer

in the world; and thus, that its meaning is, that if Ephesus did not recover her first love, the Lord would refuse her as His responsible witness, because, in truth, she would in that case have become a false witness. Whether the church of God on earth—and it will be remembered that Ephesus represents the state of the whole church at that period—has ever recovered her first love the reader can easily ascertain. If she has not, she can be no longer regarded as bearing a true testimony for God; that is, as a corporate organization. Nor let the application to separate assemblies be ignored. What of the various gatherings with which we, beloved fellow-believers, are connected? Are they in the condition of Ephesus? Nay, could the Lord commend so many things in them as He does in this assembly? What room is here afforded for heart-searching? Oh that these words of our blessed Lord might produce a mighty response throughout the length and breadth of the land!

Spite of the condition of this assembly, the Lord cannot restrain the expression of His love, and thus, after the solemn warning of coming judgment, unless she repented, He returns to commendation. "*But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*" (*v.* 6.) So far there was communion with His mind, and this it is which elicits His approbation. The Nicolaitanes, it would seem from history, were a sect who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, combining a profession of faith with loose and ungodly lives. Ephesus hated their impurities, as also did Christ.*

* At the beginning of the eighteenth century other ideas concerning this sect were promulgated, ideas derived from the meaning of the name. Thus some have maintained that Nicolas, or Nicolaus, is the Greek translation or form of Balaam, and have in this way connected the two sects. (See Rev. ii. 14, 15.) Others, confining themselves to the significance of

The epistle closes with a proclamation and a promise: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*" (*v.* 7.) An immense principle, of far-reaching application, is contained in the cry to him that hath an ear. The individual saint is invited to listen to the messages of the Spirit to the assemblies, so that, in communion with the mind of Christ, he might also judge their state by the light of the written Word. In other words, every believer is here made responsible to understand the state of things around him in the professing church. This at once sets aside, and is in entire opposition to, modern (ancient as well as modern) high church claims. According to these, the "church" is the authorized interpreter of the Word, and the authoritative expounder of all questions of faith and morals; and consequently the demand is advanced, that individual consciences must be in absolute subjection to the decisions of the "church." According to these words of our Lord, the church is to be tested by the individual saint, by every one that has an ear to hear. There could not be a more complete denial of the claims of Popery, and the principles of Romanism wherever found, than that exhibited in this proclamation.

In consonance, moreover, with this principle of individual responsibility, the promise likewise is made to the overcomers—it is "to him that overcometh." Overcoming here is not the victory over the world of which John elsewhere speaks (1 John v.), though there should surely be that also

the name, have maintained that the Nicolaitanes ("conquerors of the people") represent the growth and encroachments of the clergy. This latter idea has been often reproduced. That, however, given above is most generally received, even also as it is the best supported by historical evidence.

in the case of the believer; but it is overcoming the evil specified in the assembly. That which the Lord here deplores is the loss of their first love. Whoever therefore, by grace, regained this would be, in the sense of this scripture, an overcomer, and, as such, would be entitled to the special promise here made. The promise itself is general. In Eden, in man's paradise, there was the tree of life; but this tree of life is in the paradise of God, and would therefore never be forfeited. In this way the Lord seeks to encourage the saints to overcome, giving them this promise to cheer their hearts and to sustain them in their conflict with the evil that was already springing up within the sphere of the assembly.*

(2) SMYRNA.

(*vv.* 8–11.)

The assembly at Smyrna, like that at Philadelphia, is free from blame. The word addressed to the angel is one of comfort and encouragement, as suited to the special circumstances; and is thus a revelation of the heart of the Lord for His own.

The first thing to arrest our attention is the character in which Christ presents Himself to the angel of the church. In the case of Ephesus, as there pointed out, the general position of Christ, as walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and holding the seven stars in His right hand, is assumed; here there is a distinct

* The question is sometimes put, Will not all saints, whether overcomers or not, eat of the tree of life (and also share in the other special promises) in the paradise of God? This is to miss the whole point of the instruction. The Lord speaks only to the overcomer, and he only has this promise for present cofmort and encouragement while in the sphere of responsibility and conflict.

relation between the character of the presentation and the circumstances and state of the assembly. It is thus: "*These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.*" (*v.* 8.) He had so named Himself when addressing John, who had fallen at His feet as dead when he beheld Him in the vision as the Son of man, and yet the Ancient of days. He recalls the same truths, truths connected with His person and work, for the sustainment of this persecuted and suffering assembly. As "the first and the last," He reminds her of the eternity of His being, that "He is before all things" (Col. i. 17), that He is "beyond as before death God Himself; but more than that, He has Himself met and gone through its power."

The adaptation of such a presentation to those who had death daily in prospect can readily be apprehended. It would draw away their eyes from the perils by which they were surrounded, to Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever; and who, having gone down into death, had through death "destroyed" him that had the power of death, and delivered those who through fear of death had been all their lifetime subject to bondage. Now it was precisely through fear of death that Satan, at this moment, was seeking to terrify and turn aside this assembly. To meet this effort of the enemy, this roaring lion, the Lord, in His infinite grace, calls the attention of His beloved people to Himself as the One who had risen out of death, having exhausted for His people all its power as the judgment of God; so that they might, if death were in view, be for ever able to adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin: and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be

to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. xv. 55–57.)

It will aid for the clearer understanding of the circumstances of this assembly, and the message addressed to its angel, if its relation, as to time, with Ephesus is shown. Ephesus represents, as the reader will remember, the sub-apostolic period; that is, the period immediately following upon the apostolic age; and the state of the assembly was then characterized by the loss of her first love. But God, whatever the state of His people, never abates His love for them; and hence it is, that in Smyrna, which represents the period next after that of the Ephesian state of things, we find persecution. God allowed it, permitted Satan to stir it up, that He might use it to arrest the church's growing decline. Satan's object was to extinguish God's testimony upon the earth; God's aim and end through Satan's activity was to purify, to restore, His people, in order that His testimony through them might shine out the more brightly upon the moral darkness of this world. He deals in the same way with individuals. In Job's case, as also in Peter's, Satan sought to pervert and to destroy their souls. "The end of the Lord" was their fuller blessing—an end that was abundantly realized.

The condition of the angel of this assembly is first given, "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty* (*but thou art rich*), *and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*" (*v.* 9.) Nothing escapes the notice of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire. Even as from the mountain-top, though it was night, He beheld His disciples toiling in rowing, so He beholds all the circumstances of the angel of the church at Smyrna. So much is contained in the first words, common to these epistles, "I know thy

works."* Afterwards we have two words which unfold the special condition of the assembly—tribulation and poverty. Tribulation will mean, as often in the New Testament, the trials consequent on persecution.† The strong wind of persecution had once again set in upon God's poor of the flock, raised by the god of this world in his enmity against Christ. We who live in this day, when the profession of Christ entails no cross, unless indeed it be accompanied with devoted discipleship, cannot easily understand the perils by which the saints in early centuries were surrounded. Often regarded as the enemies of their neighbours, as well as of the state, they were frequently surrounded by their foes, who, like a pack of hungry wolves, sought to devour them from off the face of the earth. To confess Christ under these conditions was to hazard life, property (if any were possessed), and friends; and thus it came to pass, as we read in the Hebrews, that many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." (Chap. xi. 36, 37.) And what supported them under these unparalleled sufferings? The knowledge that the Lord loved them, and that, as here, He knew their tribulation. They thus willingly suffered the loss of all things, knowing that they had in heaven a better inheritance.

It is exceedingly significant that the word poverty should follow upon tribulation. The poverty of this

* Some editors, however, omit these words from this epistle; but the truth is implied, if not stated.

† See for an example of this 2 Thess. i. 4.

assembly might be the consequence of its persecutions, even as we read of some who, in the tribulation of their day, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, because, like Moses, they esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. It must also be borne in mind that, in days of persecution, those who are rich, even if really converted, are more liable to the temptation to withhold a confession of Christ. The poverty mentioned, therefore, might easily be accounted for, even if we did not recall the words that "not many mighty, not many noble, are called . . . but God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised . . . yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Cor. i. 26–29.) One thing we may be sure of, that this assembly, characterized as it was by poverty, was despised and contemned by the world. Whatever gains the adhesion of the leaders of this age will always be held in esteem; but to be identified with a rejected Christ is always to secure the world's scorn. Hence the Lord Himself said to His disciples, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

But what is the Lord's estimate of this poor assembly? There is ever utter contrariety between His thoughts and those of the world; and He thus says, after naming Smyrna's poverty, "But thou art rich." So is it even with poor believers; for "hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James ii. 5.) The same writer also says, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted," exalted surely by grace alone, through the infinite and eternal blessings

which he possesses in Christ, which are the true riches. This truth needs insisting upon in a day like the present, when the mammon of this world has become the snare of the professing church, and when those who claim the possession of more light, as well as to be in the path of separation, are in danger of being attracted by the world's respectability, wealth, and position. It is then of this poor assembly, that possessed none of these things, that the Lord says, "Thou art rich"—rich, not in the eyes of men, but towards God. How blessed such a commendation! And what joy must it have begotten in the midst of this suffering assembly!

It was not only the persecuting, worldly power that Satan had stirred up against Smyrna, but also the deadly opposition and enmity of the Jews. By these the assembly was blasphemed, that is, railed against, or slandered. As we find everywhere in the records of preaching the gospel, the Jews were ever foremost among the enemies of Christianity.* And this is easily understood. They had been God's chosen people; they possessed the sacred oracles; their rites and ceremonies were divinely instituted; and they had been invested with special and exclusive privileges and promises. When, therefore, the middle wall of partition between them and the Gentiles was thrown down, and grace was proclaimed to all alike, consequent upon their rejection of the Messiah, their deadliest enmity was aroused, and, in Satan's hand, who stirred up their hostile jealousy, they became his most effective instruments to oppose the church of God; for in this way he united in his cause religion with the world. It is ever the case, as another has written, that those who have the pretension of being the legitimate, hereditary

* See, for example, 1 Thessalonians ii. 14–16.

people of God are always the persecutors, whether Jews or Christians.

But the Lord passes judgment upon them, and exposes their true character. They were not Jews, He says; *i.e.*, they had forfeited their claims to be His people by their rejection of Christ. The believing remnant now occupied the place of the Israel of God. The Jews prided themselves upon being Abraham's children, but this gave them now no title to God's favour; and the Lord expresses this in the strongest possible way when He says they are "the synagogue of Satan," for this is what they were morally, as led on, gathered together, and energized, by him for his own evil purposes. This is a solemn lesson for those who array themselves in opposition to, or who slander and speak contemptuously of, the feeble few who to-day seek to maintain, with whatever failures, the honour of Christ and subjection to His word. Nothing but faithfulness to Him, begotten of His own grace, and sustained by His own power, could lead any to take the outside place without the camp; but it is those that are there whom the Lord guards and blesses, so that opposition to them is opposition to Him.

Exhortation, comfort, and promise follow: "*Fear none of those things which thou* shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you* into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (*v.* 10.) The first word, if an exhortation, is full of encouragement. Sufferings lay in the path of the saints, but they were not

* The reader will remark that the Lord here passes from the angel, in His address, to the saints. This shows that in Smyrna the condition of the assembly, corresponded with that of those represented by the angel. This is not always the case.

to be afraid. Why, short-sighted unbelief might enquire, did not the Lord interpose to shield them from these fiery trials? It was because He loved them too well. God's people—the church—as before pointed out, were being drawn into the vortex of the world; and it was to effect their deliverance from this danger that persecution was permitted to arise. This was the Lord's chosen instrumentality to accomplish His purposes of love; but if His saints must thus suffer, He will yet draw near to them with words of cheer and consolation.

He reveals, moreover, the form of the coming trial. Through the activity of the devil some of them should be cast into prison, where they should have the honour of suffering for the name of Christ, being counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. But wherefore? That they might be "tried." In such ways the Lord purifies His own from the contaminations of the world, tests their faith, and brings out what is lying dormant in their hearts. Even the Lord Himself trod the path of temptation. He was tempted in all points as we, apart from sin; and He could thus say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." But we, alas! like Peter, often do not know ourselves until we find ourselves in the presence of the enemy; and it is on this very account that we need to be tried, both to learn what we are, and then what God is for us in the trial.

Another thing is revealed for their comfort. If Satan was about to be let loose upon them, the trial should be limited. The tribulation should only last for ten days.*

* Whether this is an actual or typical period, the truth remains the same; viz., that Satan could not extend this tribulation beyond the time divinely appointed. This reveals clearly to us that Satan, in all his efforts against the people of God, can only accomplish God's will.

Lastly, the Lord promises the crown of life to those who should be faithful unto death. It is essential to perceive that this fidelity unto death is not faithfulness throughout our natural lives, but martyrdom for the sake of Christ and His word. It is an exhortation to be faithful, even at the cost of life; as, for example, Stephen and James, the brother of John, were, and as thousands since their day have been, by the grace of God. It is this character of fidelity the Lord urges upon this assembly in the circumstances of tribulation, through which she soon would have to pass: for there are many saints who would find the prospect of death, a death of martyrdom, a death, in the eyes of men, "of shame and loss"—the most searching test to which they could be subjected. He who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust—yea, more, who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities—provides therefore the antidote; cheers His people, in view of the impending trial, and incites them to constancy and courage, with the promise of the crown of life. One perceives instantly the blessed adaptation of the promise to the circumstances. What would constitute the temptation to unfaithfulness? The fear of death, or a clinging to life in this world. It is to meet this, and to raise the thoughts of any of His own who might be feeble and despondent about the present, that He speaks to them of the crown of life—life in its full fruition, crowned, as it were, with His own special approbation; life, eternal life, disencumbered from all entanglements, feasting to the full on its own proper objects, displayed in all its perfections in its own proper sphere in the Lord's own presence, where, conformed to His own image, those who have been faithful unto death here will enjoy the special

place in glory which the Lord in His grace may award. This is the crown of life.*

As in Ephesus, the epistle closes with a call for attention, and the promise to the overcomer, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" (*v.* 11.) Again the individual is made responsible, not to hear and yield obedience to the church, but to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These are very different things, for hereby we are each reminded of our responsibility to listen for ourselves to the word of God. Freedom of conscience is much vaunted, but here we learn that the word of God is supreme, has authoritative claims upon the conscience, and demands from every believer unhesitating and unquestioning obedience. The only infallibility therefore to be found is in the Scriptures. To transfer it to the church is a direct contravention of these words of our blessed Lord.

Finally, we have the promise to the overcomer. To overcome in Ephesus is to recover through repentance that first love which had been lost, and to do the first works. Here it is to be found faithful unto death, to be courageous for the Lord and His testimony in the face of all Satan's terrors. It is therefore through perseverance in fidelity, and victory—surely only in the power of the Holy Spirit—over all timidity and cowardice, that a saint in Smyrna would be constituted an overcomer. And to all such the promise is, that they should not be hurt of the second death. Satan may be permitted to kill the

* To speak of the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, &c., as so many different crowns to be worn by the believer is to materialize the blessed spiritual truths which are exhibited in the figure. No doubt, however, they are special distinctions, which the Lord is pleased to bestow as rewards for service.

body, as in the case of John the Baptist, but after that there is no more that he can do. The moment the body dies, the spirit departs to be with Christ, and the body is watched over, and at the coming of Christ will be raised in incorruption, and death will for ever be swallowed up in victory. Death therefore should have no terrors for the saint, whatever the form in which it may come; and nothing will impart more courage to him in the prospect of it than the assurance of the full consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ; viz., the complete deliverance of His people from sin and all its results. When therefore they are threatened with martyrdom, if they cleave to Him, He sustains their souls by holding out before them this blessed promise, that on them the second death—the lake of fire—has no claim. It is the full result on the side of deliverance, of His own death on the cross.

(3) PERGAMOS.

(*vv.* 12-17.)

THE church at Pergamos represents the public state of Christianity, not immediately following upon Smyrna, but the state rather into which the church declined after the blessing realized through the persecution which arose at that period. When the church had lost her first love, God in His care for His people permitted persecution to arrest further backsliding. This end was accomplished for a season, and then, when the revived energies of the church again drooped, there was further decline, decline now into a worldly state and condition.

The same thing precisely may be seen in the book of Judges, where the history of God's dealings with Israel shadows forth His ways with the church. The book of

Judges is a history of revivals—the record of Israel's failure in the land, and of God's constant intervention in grace for their succour, when they had been humbled before Him through the power of the enemy. The remarkable thing, however, is (and it is exceedingly instructive to notice it), that every fresh interposition on behalf of His people, every new revival, as it may be termed, left them, when the sense of the grace they had received had died out, in a worse state than before. So it has been in the history of the church. Revival after revival has been sent in mercy to restore the life of the saints, to deepen God's work in their souls, and to call them back to the authority of God's word; but when each succeeding wave of blessing has passed away, the outward state of Christianity has ever deteriorated. This is illustrated also in the first three churches; so that, coming to Pergamos, we find, in comparison with Ephesus, notwithstanding God's interference in Smyrna, a sad decline. Sorrowful as the truth is, it is but the history of every dispensation. Whatever God has set up in this world has failed from the very commencement, and has constantly, in spite of all His grace, pursued a downward path, and ended, even as Laodicea teaches us in respect of the church, in total failure and rejection. To understand this is to possess the key for the interpretation of all the successive dispensations.

The presentation of Christ to the angel of Pergamos is again in reference to the state of the assembly: "*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges.*" (*v.* 12.) The meaning of this symbol is constant; it is a figure of the word of God, and of the effect of its judicial application. We read, for example, in Hebrews: "The word of God is

quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Chap. iv. 12, 13.) This striking scripture combines indeed the omniscient eyes, which are as a flame of fire, with the all-penetrating, searching, and exposing effect of the application of the divine Word. When the Lord therefore describes Himself in this way to the angel of Pergamos, He is warning the assembly that He is about to search into and declare her spiritual condition, that He is judging her state by the application of the infallible Word. The following verses contain the result of His judicial examination.

First, however, He places what is possible to her credit. He says, "*I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you,* where Satan dwelleth.*" (*v.* 13.) It is ever the Lord's way to commend, wherever there is anything that meets with His approbation, before He declares the failures of His people. It is so here, although the facts intermingled with His approval constitute really the gravest grounds for censure. For, after the reminder that He knows their works, He adds, "And where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." Where then is Satan's seat? Satan is,

* Once again, we may call atention to the way in which the Lord passes from the angel to the saints. It shows that, while He holds the angel responsible for the state of the assembly, He has the assembly in view in the instructions and warnings given.

as we know, the god of the world, and the world therefore is the place of his throne.* What an anomaly then for the church to be *dwelling* in the world! Saints are not of the world, even as Christ, when down here, said that He was not of the world; and we learn from the Ephesians that they are seated in the heavenlies in Christ. It is to heaven accordingly the church belongs, and it is there, while earth is the scene of her testimony and service, that she should now in spirit dwell. But, alas! we behold in Pergamos the fact that the church had forgotten both her heavenly calling and her heavenly character, and had settled down in the world. Afterwards, in this book, we read of the "dwellers upon earth," and this expression signifies a moral character, those whose minds were upon earthly things. In like manner, dwelling where Satan's throne is, is descriptive of character and state, showing that the assembly had fallen from her pristine condition, had, under the influences of the age, lost sight of her true place and her heavenly hopes, and had accepted a home in the world.

Still there were things the Lord could commend. Pergamos had held fast the name of Christ, and had not denied His faith. The name of Christ is generally the expression of the truth of what He is; but put here in combination with the faith the meaning will be slightly different. It will probably be holding fast the confession of the name of Christ, confessing Christ boldly, though dwelling where Satan's throne was, and not denying the faith; that is, the truth concerning Christ. (Compare 2 Tim. iv. 7; Jude 3, &c.) The first part of the commendation is stronger than the second, inasmuch as "holding fast" is more positive than "not denying." Still it was

* The word should be rendered "throne."

no small thing, and as such it was grateful to the Lord's heart, and hence His delight to notice it, that, notwithstanding the worldly circumstances of this assembly, His name was held fast and His truth not denied. Would that so much could be said in this day! For what do we behold? Alas! the confession of Christ given up on every hand, and His truth rejected, and this in the midst (and might it not be said as a consequence?) of the boasted progress and enlightenment of the nineteenth century.

A circumstance, moreover, is added which augments the force of the Lord's commendation. This degree of faithfulness had been maintained even in the midst of violent persecution, during which "my faithful witness," the Lord says, "was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Nothing is known of Antipas* beyond what is here stated. His name is written in the everlasting Word, and the Lord's own verdict is appended. From this we know that, in the presence of the power of Satan (where Satan dwelleth), he bore faithful testimony, that he was one that could not be silenced, and that, like Stephen, he sealed his testimony with his blood. Yea, even as his Lord, he resisted unto blood striving against sin. And who shall tell, whether it was not his noble example which was used to sustain this assembly, notwithstanding she had slipped into the world, in her holding fast the name of Christ, and not denying His faith?

After having praised all that He could praise, the Lord proceeds to point out the things that deserved His censure. "*But*," He says, "*I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who*

* A theory has been broached on the foundation of the meaning of his name, "Against all;" but all such speculations are devoid of authority.

taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." (*vv.* 14, 15.) The rapid progress of the church's decline, as has often been noticed, is seen in the fact that whereas in Smyrna Satan is outside as a roaring lion, a persecuting Satan, here in Pergamos he is inside as a seducing Satan, perverting the saints by false seductive teaching. The words used are very significant. It is not that the church has adopted the teaching, but there are those inside that "hold" the doctrine, and they were allowed, it would seem, to hold it unmolested and unrebuked. What then was the doctrine that drew forth the Lord's reprobation? It was the doctrine of Balaam—a very gross doctrine, as he taught it in order to seduce the children of Israel. But it is the thing signified which has to be ascertained. Speaking through Balaam, Jehovah had said that Israel should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations. The fact of the Lord's presence with them separated them, as Moses had said, from all the nations of the earth. Now it was just this separation from "the world" that Baalam was seeking to break down when he enticed Israel to unite with the Midianites in their worship and sins. *Association with the world in its pleasures, sins, and pursuits is therefore the doctrine of Balaam;* and the consequence of its acceptance is the loss of Nazariteship, the loss of separation from evil, and of devotedness to the Lord.

And was this sect a mere passing phenomenon in the church's history? Is it unknown to-day? Is it not true, on the other hand, that it has from that day gone on increasing in numbers and influence until the whole

church has become leavened with this pernicious doctrine? There are undoubtedly those, as in the latter days of the kingdom (Ezekiel ix. 4), who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in her midst; but it is not too much to say, that the whole church, as existing to-day, holds this doctrine that the Lord here condemns. Is it not the case, moreover, that the feeble few who at first sought to purge themselves from it are in danger of falling again under its influence? Who will deny, indeed, that even these are exhibiting increasing signs of worldliness; that, restive under what is now thought to be the undue narrowness and exclusiveness of those whom God in His mercy first called out to be the depositaries of His recovered truth, they are beginning to be more tolerant of those who hold Balaam's doctrine? May the Lord Himself produce searching of heart and self-judgment in connection with this subject.

There were also at Pergamos those that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. We see again the evidence of advance in evil. The Lord commended Ephesus, because she hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; He now rebukes Pergamos, because there are within her borders those that hold their doctrine. This wretched sect—a sect which covered up, even as the Pharisees of old, godless lives under a pretended sanctity, and a punctilious regard to religious duties (See Matt. xxiii.) had now found a recognized place among the saints. It could not be otherwise, since the assembly had abandoned her pilgrim and unworldly character, and had, in imitation of Lot, not only pitched her tent towards, but had even taken up her abode in, Sodom. Separation cannot be maintained in the world, dwelling where Satan's throne is. Once adopt the world as our home, we must become worldly in

habits, thoughts, and practices. This explains the existence of these sects in Pergamos, which had thus glided into the acceptance of that which the Lord hated.

But the church had been espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ. It is impossible therefore for Him to allow her without warning to continue in unfaithfulness. Accordingly He cries, "*Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*" (*v.* 16.) The warning to repent is addressed to the church, for the Lord seeks to arouse her to self-judgment for having tolerated this evil teaching within her borders. He will give her the opportunity of having fellowship with His own mind about the evil, that she may have the privilege of caring for the honour of His name. It was so in Israel. Jehovah ever called upon His people, when evil and corruption abounded, to sanctify His great name, while warning them at the same time that if they failed to do so He would Himself take the matter in hand and sanctify His own name.* In like manner here the assembly is called to repent, but failing this, she is warned that the Lord will come to her quickly, and will fight against (not her, but) them—that is, those who hold the evil doctrine—with the sword of His mouth.

This gives a principle of the utmost importance, as applicable to cases of discipline in the assembly, or to the state of the whole church. Thus if evil is permitted to pass unjudged in the assembly, owing to the indifference or laxity of the saints, or from unwillingness to face the difficulty, the Lord will first wait in His longsuffering, and seek through one and another, by whatever means He may

* See, for example, as an illustration of this principle, Ezekiel xxxvi. 16–24.

choose, to awaken the consciences of His people; and then, if they fail to respond to His exhortations, He will come in Himself and deal with the evil which the assembly had failed to judge, and in which all, by refusing to judge, had become implicated. It should never be forgotten that holiness becomes the house of God, and that our God is a consuming fire.

The sword of His mouth is, as before explained, the living and powerful word of God. It is with this the Lord fights against evil-doers; and thereby He teaches us that its authority is supreme over His saints, and that the state of the assembly, as well as the doctrine and conduct of the saints, must ever be judged by this infallible standard. Well would it have been for the church at large if this had ever been remembered.

As in the other epistles, we have, lastly, the proclamation and the promise. The proclamation is to every one that has an ear. So in the days of His flesh the Lord often cried, "He that hath ears to ear, let him hear"; that is, he that hath an inward ear, an ear opened by the Holy Spirit to listen to, and to receive, the communications made. Every one such is called upon to attend to "what the Spirit saith to the churches," and these divine messages are to sink into our souls, excluding man's thoughts, and to govern our conduct. It is to us individually, to you and to me, beloved reader, the Lord thus speaks, as He reminds us of our individual responsibility.

The promise is special and twofold: "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*" (*v.* 17.) The overcomer differs again from the one in Smyrna. To overcome here is not merely to resist, and successfully to

resist, the teaching of the sects named; but it is also to listen to the call to repentance. For though the proclamation is to saints individually, and the responsibility is individual to heed the communications made, it is not possible for a saint to divest himself of responsibility for the state of the assembly. The state of the assembly involves all, so that all have to be exercised on account of it in self-judgment before God. If, therefore, any would be overcomers in a Pergamos state of things, they must judge the evil of the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes, and they must humble themselves before God because these evils are, if not accepted, yet tolerated, mourning on account of the dishonour thus done to the Lord's name.

To all such there is a twofold promise; first, that they shall "eat of the hidden manna." There is a very distinct relation between the promise and the evil in Pergamos. The temptation was to eat of things sacrificed to idols; the Lord says, "I will feed you with that which alone can satisfy." In such a way He would encourage His own to resist the seductions and gratifications of the world. And what is the "hidden manna"? It is, as has been written, "Christ as known in His walk down here, though now in glory—the corn of that heavenly land. The 'hidden manna' was not the daily manna, but the manna which had been laid up in the ark, and kept as a witness in Canaan." What answers to this figure is clearly Christ in heaven; but His being in heaven, at the right hand of God, constantly reminds us of what He has been down here in the wilderness, of what He was as tempted and humbled; and, being ourselves in wilderness circumstances, beset, as in Pergamos, by special temptations, we delight to recall Him to our remembrance, and to feed upon Him,

as the One who was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin, and we are sustained and strengthened. We thus eat of the "hidden manna"; for, as the manna, Christ is no longer seen, being hidden in heaven.

> "There on the hidden bread
> Of Christ—once humbled here—
> God's treasured store—for ever fed,
> His love my soul shall cheer."

There is also the white stone with the new name written thereon, known only to him who receives it. Two things are thus implied; the Lord's approbation, and, secondly, this approbation conveyed in a special way, so that it becomes a secret between the soul and the Lord. The following remarks express this: "The 'white stone' seems to mark the individual approbation of Christ; the 'new name,' peculiar intercourse between Christ and the individual, different from that which all share alike, different from the public joy. . . . Besides the public joy, there will be Christ's peculiar private individual recognition and approval—the 'white stone,' and the new name 'which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.'"* One can readily comprehend the sustainment and courage which such a promise would minister to those who, by God's grace, were standing for Him against the corruptions that had found their home in the assembly, and who, on this very account, would surely incur the disfavour and opposition of those who were tolerating, if not associated with, the seducing doctrines. To seek alone the Lord's approbation, is the offspring of the single eye, even as it is the source of all strength in conflict and service. The Lord give us all to make this our daily object! (2 Cor. v. 9.)

* *Collected Writings of J. N. D.* Vol. ii. Practical, pp. 509–10.

(4) THYATIRA.

(*vv.* 18–29.)

A new state of things altogether is introduced with Thyatira. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos represent, in their prophetical aspect, three successive phases or states of the whole church. Thyatira represents also a church state, only coming on the scene, as to the church condition it portrays, after, and superseding Pergamos, it continues, unlike the first three assemblies, on to the close. Pergamos passes over into Thyatira, and then Thyatira remains, as one phase of the church, to the end. This is seen by the introduction into this epistle of the Lord's coming. (*v.* 25.) Another characteristic of this assembly is that a remnant, a faithful remnant, is distinguished. This is more plainly perceived, if verse 24 is read, as it should be, "But unto you I say, unto the rest in Thyatira," "the rest" being the remnant, and as such directly addressed, and not, as the whole church is, through the angel. This borne in mind will enable the reader to understand more readily some parts of this communication.*

As a whole, then, this assembly gives a picture of the state of the church during the Middle Ages, down, perhaps, as has been often said, to the time of the Reformation. The grounds of this conclusion are found in the previous church states. If Ephesus sets forth the period immediately succeeding the apostles, Smyrna shadows out the age of persecution, which, as the church histories show, will bring us down several centuries later;

* As pointed out in the Introduction, four parties are distinguished: The angel to whom the letter is sent, and who is responsible for the state of the assembly; Jezebel—the source of Popery, as well as the expression of it—suffered by the angel; the remnant; and the overcomer.

and then Pergamos indicates the period, as, for example, in Constantine's days, when the Church became allied with the world. In this way, if we remember the successional character of these several states, we are brought, as has been observed, to the Middle Ages; yet not so far as Luther's time, inasmuch as Sardis followed soon upon the mighty movement of which he was the instrument.

The character in which Christ addresses this assembly through the angel is quite different from that in which He speaks to the preceding churches. Here, first of all, it is as "*Son of God*"; and it is as Son, as will be remembered, that He wields authority over the house of God. (Heb. iii. 6.*) The eyes "*like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass,*" are in entire accord with His presentation as the One who exercises this authority; for the eyes like to a flame of fire symbolize His all-searching, penetrating judgment, and His feet of fine brass the firmness with which He deals with sin, and deals with it in divine righteousness; for brass is an emblem of God meeting man in his responsibility according to His righteousness. The brazen altar teaches this truth; for it was there that God met those who approached, and there that His righteous claims were satisfied by the offered sacrifice.

The very character, therefore, in which Christ is here seen demanded, and demands, solemn attention. He has not abandoned one of His relationships of grace, nor abated one jot of His ineffable love for His people; but He comes here, let it be recalled, to deal with the public state of the church, and with the church as His responsible light-bearer, or witness, in the world; and coming for this

* The rendering in the English version, "His own house," would seem to make it Christ's house. It should be, however, "His house"; *i.e.*, God's house.

purpose, He reminds the angel of His absolute authority over the house of God, of His all-penetrating, consuming judgment, and of His constant purpose not to pass over sin or failure. These solemn characters never cease, as long as the church holds the responsible place of testimony; and however she may have failed and surrendered her testimony, she is no less in the place of responsibility before God. This holds true also in principle of single assemblies, and even of individual believers. May the Lord lay our responsibilities more deeply upon our hearts.

After the presentation of the characters the Lord here assumes, we have, first, His commendation: "*I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith,* and thy patience, and thy works; and the last more than the first.*" (*v.* 19.) This is very great praise, and it has occasioned perplexity to some, in that, if Thyatira† represents the Popery of the Middle Ages, such an eulogium was possible. It must be borne in mind that, all through the Scriptures, whenever there is corporate failure, the faithful remnant become invested with the corporate position before God. The Jewish remnant, for example, came, on the nation's apostasy, into the place of the nation. So in the church of God; and, on this principle, the Lord is able to impute to Thyatira all the state and activities of the devoted saints in her midst.

Concerning this class of faithful witnesses at this period, we cannot refrain from transcribing the following words:

* The order should be, even as it is the order morally, "Charity and faith and service."

† This statement needs modification in so far as it is rather Jezebel, and the state of things produced by her teaching, that represent Popery. This was tolerated by the angel, and thus there was moral identification between the two; but the angel is plainly held responsible for the allowance of Jezebel.

"Nowhere, perhaps, is there a more deeply interesting story; nowhere longer and more unwearied patience; nowhere truer, or perhaps so true, hearts for Christ and for the truth, and for faithfulness to Him against a corrupt church, as in the saints of the Middle Ages. Through toil and labour, hunted and punished; in spite of a system far more persevering, far better organized, than heathen persecutions, violent as for a time they surely were; with no fresh miraculous revelation, or publicly sustaining body, or profession of the church at large, clothed with universal acknowledgment as such, to give them confidence; with every name of ignominy that people or priest could invent to hunt them with, they pursued their hemmed but never abandoned way with divinely-given constancy, and maintained the testimony of God, and the promised existence of the church against the gates of hades, at the cost of rest and home and life and all things earth could give or nature feel. And Christ had foreseen and had not forgotten it. Weakness may have been there, ignorance have marked many of their thoughts; Satan may have sought to mix up mischief with their good, and sometimes succeeded . . . but their record is on high, and their Saviour's approbation will shine forth when the books ease-loving questioners have written on them will be as dust on the moth's wing when it is dead. . . . This the Lord owns in Thyatira. It made no part of the church for men then; it makes none for many wise people now. It is the first part for Christ."*

This extract fully explains the ground of the Lord's commendation, and entirely sets aside the attempt made in some quarters to find support in this verse for the Popish doctrine of works as constituting merit before

* *Collected Writings of J. N. D.* Vol. ii. Expository, pp. 506-7.

God. The very order of the words teaches otherwise. After the general statement, expressive of the Lord's perfect knowledge, comes "charity" [love], which in its essence is the divine nature, and the root, therefore, of all spiritual activity; next, faith, that faith which works by love; and then service, patience [endurance], and works; and these more than the first. It is thus the increasing devotedness of the saints, and this exhibited in the midst of the fiery trials through which they were passing. It was this, so precious to the Lord, that drew forth His approbation.

Having expressed this, He points out in the next place the grievous things that called forth His censure. "*Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman* Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*" (*v.* 20.) It is well known, as a principle in Scripture, that a woman, when introduced as a type, is expressive of a state, whereas a man indicates the activity or conduct in that state. Hence it makes no difference to the interpretation whether we read "woman" or "thy wife," for in either case the angel is held responsible for Jezebel; and the very name Jezebel points to the meaning. She was the wife of Ahab, who was responsible to God for the kingdom; but he "suffered" Jezebel to govern, to "teach," and to produce in that way the apostate state of Israel. In like manner the "angel" of Thyatira had, unfaithful to his responsibility as God's representative in the

* Some prefer the reading, "thy wife." If this is adopted, it will mean that not only had the angel allowed Jezebel to teach, but that also he had entered into an alliance with her; and that he was therefore doubly responsible.

assembly, permitted the teaching of "Jezebel," the fruit of which was seen in every kind of spiritual corruption and worldliness, and that originated a system of doctrine which begot many adherents (*vv.* 22, 23), and produced that masterpiece of Satan, in his imitation of the truth of God, which is known the wide world over as Popery.

Into such a condition had the church now fallen; and so far from Jezebel being sensible of the evil of which she had been the wicked instrument, she refused to acknowledge it and repent; for the Lord says, "*I gave her space to repent . . . and she repented not.*"* If we adopt the reading referred to below, it is not only that Jezebel neglected to avail herself of the opportunity of repentance, vouchsafed in the Lord's longsuffering, but such was her hardened condition that it was not her will to repent; and it may be that these words also contain the assertion that Popery will continue, as we know will be the case, unrepentant on to the end.

Judgment is now threatened. "*Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*" (*vv.* 22, 23.) It is very striking to notice that, although we have been told that Jezebel "will not repent," the Lord still says, when giving these solemn warnings of coming and certain judgment, "Except they repent of their deeds." It reveals both His longsuffering and His yearnings over His professed people for their recovery

* The preferable reading is, "And she will [or "willeth"] not repent." The Revised Version and most others now adopt it.

and restoration. The judgment, which is of the severest character, is denounced upon Jezebel and them that had committed adultery with her. (Compare Ezekiel xvi.; Revelation xviii. 3–9, &c.) "It would be forced association with those she had once seduced to the ruin of them all," and "piercing judgment, according to God's own nature and requirements." The activity of Jezebel is seen from the fact that there are "children"—those who had been begotten and formed by her evil teaching, and who therefore presented themselves as the expression and exponents of her views. Alas! how large a number of such are seen on all sides in the present day, not only within the confines of Romanism, but also amongst those who, while Romanists at heart, still maintain an external link with that which was once known by the name of Protestantism. All such, wherever found, shall be "killed with death."

This judgment may have a twofold application—present in government, and future, when every one shall give an account of himself to God. This would seem to be the case from what follows. First, the churches will know—and this could only be from the visitation of these judgments in time—that Christ searches the reins and the heart; and secondly, everyone will receive according to their works, which is the character of eternal judgment.* (See Rev. xx.) Such is the Lord's estimate of, and judgment upon Jezebel—upon, that is, the public state of things which her activity had produced; not

* This introduction of the words "every one of you" contains the solemn warning that while the "angel" is held responsible for the state of the assembly, and while "Jezebel" will be punished for her evil course, every professed believer is also accountable to God for his own works.

only, it should be remembered, upon the Jezebel state of things in John's days, nor upon that existing in the Middle Ages, but also upon that which is here prophetically shadowed out in every age until the Lord's return.

In the next place, the Lord turns to those who, notwithstanding they were in Thyatira, were separate from its evil. "*But unto you I say, unto the rest* in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.*" (*vv.* 24, 25.) We have now, and for the first time, in the growing corruption of the church a faithful remnant distinguished; and it is this remnant, let the reader remark, not the public body, not that which occupied the place of the church before the eyes of the world, which elicited the Lord's approval. And what characterized this residue? Refusal of the current teaching of the day, and consequently standing apart from the worldliness and corruption which had now obtained a recognized place. The time had thus come when those who departed from evil were accounted mad;† for those with whom they refused to walk charged them with knowing the "depths of Satan"; that is, with being led by him, as having fallen into one of his most subtle snares. And what was the occasion of this fearful charge? Separation from evil, a manifested purpose to walk in the path of truth and holiness. It was this that led Jezebel, her associates and her children, to hold this feeble few up to public odium, as they insinuated that they were in secret commerce with Satan. History has often repeated itself since that day; for whenever any of God's people

* So it should be read, as before noticed, not "*and* the rest."

† See marginal rendering of Isaiah lix. 15.

have ventured, in obedience to the word of God, to separate themselves from the corruptions of the professing church, or to purge themselves from the vessels of dishonour, they have in like manner incurred the severest condemnation, and often the most evil charges, even on the part of their fellow-Christians. But it was enough for this "rest," as it has been for the true remnant in every age of the church, to have the Lord's verdict. He says, "You have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak." Whoever seeks to care for the honour of Christ must be satisfied with His approval.

One thing only does the Lord enjoin upon the remnant: they were to hold fast what they had until He came. This might seem to be a small thing; but in the midst of corruption, when fidelity to Christ is frowned upon on every hand, and when the most powerful influences are brought to bear upon, in order to seduce, those who are maintaining the truth, it is no small thing, having done all, to stand. The whole armour of God is requisite for it; and hence the Lord would encourage the remnant to hold fast. The encouragement lies in the words, "*Till I come.*" The prospect of His coming was a strong incentive to courage, as it reminded them that His eye was upon them, and that their conflict would issue in being for ever with Him. Nothing cheers the soldier in the fight like the eye, and the expected succour, of his leader; and nothing cheers the believer, in the stress of his conflict, like the expectation of the return of his Lord.

There is another significance in the introduction here, for the first time in these epistles, of the Lord's coming. The first three assemblies, in their wider aspect, represent, as already seen, three successive phases of the church after the apostolic era and onwards. Thyatira succeeds,

but, unlike the others, continues on the scene as *a* phase of the church, even after the appearance of Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and goes on concurrently with them until the end. This explains the mention here of the coming of the Lord. Another thing should, however, be added. Until Thyatira the possibility of recovery, although all the future was lying before the Lord's eyes, was not publicly abandoned; but now the church-state has become so hopeless that the Lord directs the faithful remnant to His own return as their encouragement, resource, and hope. Happy are those saints who can apprehend this revelation of the Lord's mind.

The promise to the overcomer follows: "*And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" (*vv.* 26–29.) The reader will not fail to note a change, also indicative of the new phase commenced by Thyatira. Until now the cry, "He that hath ears to hear" precedes the promise to the overcomer. Now, and in the remaining churches, it follows. "In the first three," as has been written, "the hearing ear is spoken of in connection with the general testimony to the Church, before singling out the faithful remnant who overcome. In the four last the exhortation follows the overcoming." "This marks out the remnant as separate from the body in general. The position of the remnant is specially marked out as being no longer in connection with the general body of the church, but with the place in which those stand to whom the promise is sent as 'to him that overcometh.'"*

* *Lectures on the Addresses to the Seven Churches*, by J. N. D., pp. 33, 63.

Two things constitute the overcomer in Thyatira. First, holding fast what they had, spite of the corruption of Jezebel, maintaining their separation, walking in the path of subjection to the word of God; and, secondly, keeping Christ's works unto the end; that is, the works commended in verse 19; viz., charity (love), faith, service, patience, and works. Keeping in this blessed path until the end, cheered by the prospect of the Lord's return, and holding fast what they possessed, they would be overcomers, and entitled to feed upon these special promises. These promises have a twofold character: association with Christ in the kingdom, governing the nations righteously, and consequently executing judgment, "even," He adds, "as I received of my Father." The overcomer should receive from Him even as he had received of the Father (compare chapter iii. 21); and then also He will bestow the morning star.

The reference in the first part of the promise is to the second psalm (compare ex.), where the nations are given to Christ for His inheritance in response to His own request ("even as I received of my Father"), and where, as a consequence, we read, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (*v.* 9.) The overcomer, therefore, should share in the glory of the Messiah's kingly rule. The promise of the morning star speaks of far more intimate, and heavenly, blessing. The morning star is Christ Himself, and Christ Himself displayed in all His heavenly beauty before the hearts of His people, as their proper portion and hope while watching during the night, or rather while the night is waning, for His return. As the Sun of Righteousness He will burst forth upon the world at His appearing (Malachi iv.); as the Morning Star, the harbinger of the

coming day, He shines for the church, and thus constitutes her characteristic hope. And it is as so presented to her that her affections are drawn forth and, that having thus her desires for His return awakened, she, as taught by, and in union with, the Spirit cries, "Come." (See chapter xxii. 16, 17.) This promise, therefore, is one of exceeding preciousness: "I will give him the morning star." The overcomer should thus possess, and be associated with, Christ Himself in His heavenly character in a peculiar way, as the satisfying portion of his heart amid the darkness around, to encourage him to successful conflict with the power of evil within the church, and to animate his soul with the speedy expectation of the coming of the Lord.

The significance of the place occupied, for the first time, by the cry, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,*" has already been explained. And if this is understood, the reader will the more readily enter into the solemn responsibility attaching to all by whom this cry is heard. Raised in the midst of an Ephesian state of things, it is repeated with increased urgency, again and again, all through the history of the church; and blessed are those who listen and bow to the instruction thus given by the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER III.

(5) SARDIS.*

(*vv.* 1–6.)

THE peculiarity of the last four assemblies is, it will be remembered, that while they follow one another, as to their development, they all continue until the coming of the Lord. They do not displace one another (we speak of their prophetic aspects) as Smyrna displaces Ephesus, and Pergamos Smyrna; but, though coming successively on the scene, they will all abide to the close of the dispensation. Sardis thus came into existence after Thyatira, and this gives at once the clue to its identification. If the state in Thyatira produced by Jezebel represents the Popery of the Middle Ages, Sardis, in the state of its angel, sets forth Protestantism. But we must still enquire, Of what period?

The mighty movement called into being by the Holy Spirit through Luther and his co-workers, whether in their own or other lands, was the origin of Protestantism. In his days the teaching of Jezebel had full play, and, with the exception of those who sighed and mourned in secret over the corruptions everywhere prevalent, was

* It should perhaps have been pointed out that, as Thyatira reaches the end, Sardis is a new start, as it were, produced by a new action of the Spirit of God. This new and vigorous movement was soon arrested, and it speedily lapsed into the condition of its angel, having a name to live and yet dead. The issue is, as seen in Laodicea, rationalism, that is infidelity, whereas the close in Thyatira is ritualism. How significant is this twofold issue!

generally accepted. The children of God were in full association with the world, and would have thought it a strange thing to refrain from "eating things offered to idols." Separation from evil, save on the part of the persecuted remnant, was wholly unknown.

It was in the midst of this state of things that Luther, a vessel chosen and prepared of God for His service, appeared; and he had the privilege of recalling the people of God to the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and to the fundamental truth of justification by faith. It seemed, at the outset, the dawn of a new day, and souls on every hand drank in the blessed truths, which he and his coadjutors proclaimed, as the weary earth drinks in the fertilizing showers of heaven. Having their soul-thirst thus satisfied, they were strengthened to break off from their necks the yoke of Rome. Thousands joined in the movement—some, alas! from political motives—and Protestantism became a power in the world.

But the energy of the Spirit of God as thus displayed (for that it was His work few can doubt) soon ceased, was speedily lost amid the worldly and human activities that sought to avail themselves of His blessed work for their own selfish ends; and then the Reformation sank down into the expression of antagonism to Rome, using its new light and truth as the battle-axe of its conflicts. *This was Sardis. Not the Reformation in its pristine energy, but the Reformation as it became after its life and power had evaporated.** And this *is* Sardis, developing ever sadder and more corrupt elements until the end.

In view of this explanation the character of the Lord's presentation to the angel is very significant: "*These*

* The proof of this is seen in verses 2 and 3, where the angel is exhorted to strengthen the things that remain *and are ready to die*, &c.

things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." (*v.* 1.) The church on earth is the habitation of God through the Spirit, and is the sphere, therefore, of His operations and power. But, as we have seen, Sardis* presents no sign of His activity; and it is just because of this that the Lord presents Himself as possessing the plenary power (seven is the perfect number) of the Holy Ghost in His ministrations. The church may thus fail; but Christ (and this is for the comfort of His people amid decay, corruption, and death) never fails; and hence, whatever the state of the church, He still has at His disposal all the Spirit's power. This is an immense principle for the sustainment of the saints, constituting indeed their resource in all times. At Pentecost, for example, the Spirit wrought without let or hindrance, and the consequence was power in testimony, the energy of the "first love," and the perfect fellowship of the saints. Contemplating all this, and contrasting it with what is now seen, we might become utterly despondent unless we were reminded, as here, that there is as much power available to-day for faith as then—that Christ still has the "seven Spirits of God" at His sovereign disposal. Blessed consolation!

He has also the "seven stars." It is not now said, as to Ephesus, that He holds them in His right hand; that is, that He upholds them by power; but they still belong to Him, and He would have them both owning His authority and also counting upon Him for the supply of

* We say Sardis; but the reader will remember that it is really the angel, those set to teach and to rule who are addressed. Still it is these that produce the public state. Rationalism, for example, has ever come down from the "teachers" to the people. The remnant in this assembly are those who repelled the influences of the angel, and maintained holiness in life and walk.

their need in His service. The more broken the state of things the more He would have those who might take the place of leaders amongst the saints connect every thing with, as well as derive every thing from, Himself. When there are no visible sustainments for those in responsibility it is the more important (though this be ever so) to lean wholly on Christ.

The condition of the angel of the assembly is described in one short, sad, and pregnant sentence: "*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*" (*v.* 1.) The works are general; and "knowing" these is merely the statement that nothing escapes the Lord's notice, that He is cognizant of all the condition of His people; and then, as the result of His investigation (for He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks), He gives His verdict—His infallible verdict. And what is it? A name to live, but a name that belies its actual condition; for He says, "Thou art dead." Such was the state of the angel of Sardis—the actual, existent Sardis—as it presented itself to the eyes (and His eyes are as a flame of fire) of Christ. And this state of things represents also Protestantism as it was after the days of Luther; and, be it remembered, as it will be found until the coming of the Lord.

What then are the present applications of these solemn words? Three at least may be noted, and to these special attention is invited. First, then, there is the obvious one to the Protestantism of this and other lands. And when we speak of Protestantism, we do not speak, let it be noted, of individual congregations, but of Protestantism as a whole, as it presents itself in the world. Is its condition otherwise than here given? Even the most superficial observer must admit its truth, and even that it is now

worse than here stated. All the evangelistic movements of the day, all the meetings and conferences for the promotion of the spiritual life, are outside of the recognized organizations of Protestantism, and cannot therefore be pleaded in mitigation of this verdict. In Protestantism itself rationalism, political zeal and activity, worldliness in its manifold forms, are its vital forces; but where is there the sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit? No; spiritual stagnation—yea, death—everywhere characterizes it, even while boasting of its glorious traditions and of having a name to live. That there are here and there congregations of another order, ministered to by devoted men, we gladly admit; but this fact in no wise alters the general condition of Protestantism.* A second application, as in the case of Ephesus (and Sardis was a single assembly in John's day), may be made to individual churches or gatherings; that is, if there is an assembly anywhere corresponding in its spiritual condition with the description here given, then this letter, with its searching statements and warnings, should be seriously weighed in the presence of God. Lastly, if there is an individual—a professor—who has a name to live amongst Christians, and who yet is spiritually dead, he also would do well to ponder this divine communication.

We come now to exhortations and warnings: "*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*" (*vv.* 2, 3.) The

* In evidence of this the "Down-grade" movement may be cited. Its earnest opponent found but few supporters in his own denomination; and some of these finally accepted a compromise which *involved* the toleration of the very doctrinal errors against which the protest had been made.

words "be watchful" really mean *become* so, showing that at this time they were not watchful; for, as has been seen, it was a time of spiritual death. And the consequence of not having been watchful was that the things which remained were drooping and ready to die. These had formerly been channels of energy, instinct with life, but now were languishing from lack of spiritual energy; forms of life still remaining, but only forms, now that the life which had called them into existence had waned if not departed. The ground of this exhortation is found in the succeeding clause, "I have not found thy works perfect before God."* There were, therefore, activities still sustained in Sardis; and it is often the case that activities, which have been really called forth by a genuine work of the Holy Spirit, will be carried on, and sometimes with increased zeal, long after the power that evoked them has ceased. It was and is so in Sardis, as may be seen in its various societies, with their multiform organizations, for the accomplishment of religious and philanthropic ends. But the Lord had examined the nature of these "works," and His sentence is that they are not "complete before my God." Before man they might appear as worthy of all commendation; before God they were deficient, lacking in the essential element of good works; for, inasmuch as they were not produced by the energy of the Spirit, they were not Christian, but indeed dead works. It is the motive that determines the character of all our activities, and the motive is never Christ unless the Holy Ghost is their power.

Having exposed the real condition of Sardis, the method of restoration is next indicated. They were, in the first place, to remember how they had received and heard;

* The true rendering and reading are, "I have not found thy works complete before my God."

that is, they were to call to mind the source of all the blessings they had "received," that it was nothing but grace which had bestowed upon them such unspeakable privileges (compare 1 Cor. iv. 7); and they were to measure themselves by the standard of the truth they had "heard" at the outset. This exhortation contains a most interesting principle. The responsibility of this assembly is seen to be according to the light it had actually received. (Compare Matthew xi. 21–24.) Sardis therefore, and consequently the Sardis of to-day, is judged by the light it received at the Reformation; viz., by the truth of the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and by the doctrine of justification by faith. Could it, can it, stand the test? Why, it is in the heart of Protestantism that the full inspiration of the Scriptures is being everywhere denied, and that the dogma of justification by faith is treated as a relic of an ignorant age. Sardis would indeed do well to ponder upon these words of the Lord which point out the measure of her responsibility.* The Lord thus calls upon her to hold fast, not to let slip, and to repent, to humble herself before God, as she contrasts her present with her former condition, that there, in the true spirit of self-judgment, and owning her sad declension and fall, she might seek grace for revival and recovery.†

* It is interesting to notice that the responsibility of the individual, at least of the servant, is according to a different standard. If he does not do his Master's will, even though ignorant of it, he will be beaten with few stripes; for since the Master's will is revealed in the Scriptures there is no excuse for ignorance. (Luke xii. 48.)

† As an illustration of the fact that the angel is God's representative in the assembly, it will be noticed that all these exhortations and warnings are given to the angel. While the assembly cannot but be responsible for her state in the individual believers of which she is composed, it is to those who form the teaching body, and to those that have the lead, that the Lord looks for recovery.

Space is thus given for repentance. Should she, however, not avail herself of it, then the Lord would in His wisdom deal with her according to her deserts. The reader will remember once again that it is not Christians the Lord will judge in this way, but the church as His vessel of testimony, as His responsible light-bearer amid the darkness of this world. And what is the judgment denounced? It is that the Lord will treat the church—Sardis—even as the world, if she does not repent. This will be understood if we turn for a moment to 1 Thess. v. Writing to the saints, the apostle says, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. . . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." (*vv.* 2, 4.) In the previous chapter he had explained to the saints that they would be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, before the day of the Lord, commencing with His appearing, would be introduced. It is on the world, therefore, that the day of the Lord will come as a thief; and now Sardis is warned that, unless she repents, the Lord will come upon her in like manner. She will thus be treated as the world. It is, indeed, on Christendom, whatever its ultimate form after the church is caught away, that the day of the Lord will burst with special judgments; and it will be too at the very moment when those within its sphere are beginning to say, Peace and safety; that sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. Such will be the doom of that which, having a name to live, was yet dead.

As in Thyatira so also here a remnant is distinguished. "*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in*

white: for they are worthy." (*v.* 4.) "Names" in this place is used for persons, but as showing the Lord's intimate knowledge of them, and perhaps, at the same time, betokening the smallness of their number. The word "even" should be omitted, for the surprise is rather that there were not more separate ones in the midst of that which had rebelled against the corruptions of Thyatira. Not defiling their garments will mean that they had been kept untainted by the evils around. James thus speaks of keeping oneself unspotted from the world (chapter i. 27); here it would not only be from the world, but also from the contaminations within the sphere of God's professing people. How precious this faithful remnant were to the heart of the Lord is seen from His promise concerning them: "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." Maintaining holiness of walk and conduct while in the sphere of responsibility, their distinguishing recompense should have a conspicuous relationship to the moral separation then maintained. The practical holiness of their walk here should have its fruition in walking with Christ in white—the expressed reward for their fidelity. And He is pleased to add, "for they are worthy"—made worthy indeed by His own preserving power, but having this worthiness imputed to them by His own grace and love. (Compare Luke xxi. 36.)

Three distinct promises are made to the overcomer. To overcome in Sardis would be to remember how they had received and heard, and to hold fast and repent, and to acquire the condition of those who had not defiled their garments. This is seen from the character of the promises. First, he should "*be clothed in white raiment.*" The correspondence between this promise and that to the faithful remnant unmistakably shows that the overcomer

would be brought into that class. On four different occasions white robes or raiment are mentioned in this book. The multitude, that no man can number, who have come out of the great tribulation, are said to have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is what may be termed judicial cleansing.* (Chap. vii.) To the martyrs that were seen under the altar white robes are given (chapter vi. 9–11), and here perhaps as a token of the Lord's approbation. In chapters iv. and xix. the elders and the Lamb's wife are seen clothed in white raiment; and in the latter case we have the Holy Spirit's own interpretation in the words, "The fine linen [clean and white] is the righteousness of saints," or the righteousnesses of saints. This gives the clue to the white raiment of our passage. inasmuch as the promise refers to a future heavenly condition. The Lord thus promises that the fruit of overcoming should be manifested and enjoyed in heaven; that every act of faithfulness to Him which led to separation from unholiness here, should have its future appropriate recompense in an eternal display in His own presence.

The second promise, "*I will not blot out his name out of the book of life*," bears also a very marked relation to the condition of things in which the overcomer had been found. That which had characterized Sardis was having a name to live while it was dead. How many dead names, names of dead professors, therefore must have

* This interpretation may perhaps be questioned on two grounds; first, that the blood is for the person, for his guilt; and, secondly, that we are never said in Scripture to apply it to ourselves. Since therefore the force of the phrase is, "In the power or the virtue of the blood," it may mean that, being under its efficacy, they washed their robes, maintained purity of walk and life. The reader will weigh this suggestion.

been on its registers; and every one of these would finally be erased. In God's book of life (see Phil. iv. 3; Rev. xiii. 8; xvii. 8; xx. 15) there will be no erasures; but when profession is included, enrolled, it is otherwise, and it is this which the Lord signifies by this promise. There *may* be another meaning. When godly believers, in their desire to be found in obedience to their Lord, are compelled to stand apart from the prevailing religious corruptions, they incur the hostility of that which claims to be the church, and their names are taken off from human registers. But the Lord would sustain the hearts of His faithful ones in their trials by the assurance that their names should not be blotted out of the book of life.

There is yet more; for He adds, "*I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.*" What an honour! but one, too, publicly conferred upon the overcomer. There is nothing a soldier more ardently covets than to have his name mentioned by his commander in the despatches which announce a victory to the Queen and her government. But what is such a mark of distinction compared with this bestowed by the Lord upon those who have fought the good fight, finished their course, and kept the faith! He confesses the names of all such in the audience of His Father and of His angels. This, if an unspeakable honour, is none the less overwhelming grace. It may seem now a small and even a despicable thing for a saint to maintain the place of separation from evil, and to successfully resist all the seductions with which he is plied to fall in with the habits and practices around in the sphere of profession; but when the name of such an one is uttered by the Lord before the Father, and before all the heavenly host,

there is not one in all that countless throng that will not esteem this token of approbation as the highest honour that could be possessed. May every believer who reads these words be stirred up to seek grace to be accounted an overcomer.

The epistle closes, as in Thyatira, with the proclamation to him that hath an ear—proof of the intense yearning of the Lord over His people, and of His ardent desire that His words may find entrance into, and beget a full response from, their hearts.

(6) PHILADELPHIA.

(*vv.* 7–13.)

After Sardis comes Philadelphia; but it must be again borne in mind that, if the last four assemblies successively appear, they yet all go on concurrently to the close; that, unlike the second, third, and fourth, which displace their predecessors, these four continue, after they have come upon the scene, until the coming of the Lord. There is, moreover, a great contrast to be noted between Sardis and Philadelphia. If Sardis is Protestantism, of which there can be little doubt, it is not Protestantism, as has been previously pointed out, in its pristine energy, when the Spirit of God wrought mightily through chosen vessels, and produced what has been called the Reformation; but it is rather what Protestantism became, sunk into, after the energy of the Holy Ghost had ceased, when its life and power had crystallized into rites, forms, and organizations. Philadelphia, on the other hand, is presented to us in all its freshness and beauty, and hence elicits from the Lord nothing but commendation and promised blessing. The Lord's eye and heart are both refreshed and gratified

by this assembly.* Another thing should be observed. Both Thyatira and Sardis are intensely ecclesiastical, present themselves in the world as public church organizations; whereas Philadelphia and, in a measure, Laodicea, are more moral states and conditions. This will be seen more fully afterwards; only it will help to the interpretation if this is remembered.

Coming to the letter to the angel of this assembly, we have, first of all, after the address, as in the others, the characters in which the Lord is presented: "*These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.*" (*v.* 7.) The difference in this presentation from those already considered is at once perceived. Here it is what He is in Himself, moral character, as might be said, exhibiting, it is true, what the Lord is, but indicating also what this exhibition should produce in His people, if rather we may not say His requirements from those who would, in an evil day, meet His mind and receive His approbation. As another has written, "It is His personal character, what He is intrinsically, holy and true, what the Word displays and requires, and what the Word of God is in itself—moral character and faithfulness. Indeed, this last word includes all—faithfulness to God within and without, according to what is revealed, and faithful to make good all He has declared." And it should not be forgotten that this presentation of Himself is abiding, and, as such, declaring to the saints of to-day

* It should, however, be noted that the assembly as such does not appear. The address is to the angel all through, whether commendation, promise, or exhortation. It is, therefore, the state of those symbolized by the angel; but we cannot doubt that the assembly is, as it were, behind the angel; that, in other words the states of the angel and of the assembly are identical.

that nothing which does not answer to Him as the holy and the true can command His approval. "There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that Word which He will certainly make good."

Together with this He possesses "the key of David"; that is, as is plain from the scripture whence this figure is taken (Isaiah xxii. 22), the power of administration. Outwardly He does not interfere, and to unbelief He might appear as utterly unconcerned as to the confusion and tumult around, as He did to His disciples, when sleeping in the boat while the storm was raging. But He never surrenders His prerogative; He possesses the key of government, and it is He, therefore, and He alone, "that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." What a consolation! It might seem to be human instrumentalities alone that often close the door; if so to sight, they are but carrying out His will, though they themselves may be acting in the flesh. The servant should not, therefore, attempt to open a closed door; while, on the other hand, if the Lord has opened it, he may peacefully rest in the assurance that none can shut it.

Having called attention to Himself and to His administrative power, the Lord then addresses the angel of the assembly: "*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*" (*v.* 8.) Inverting the order, we may, first, dwell on the characteristics of this assembly, as they form, in fact, the ground of the announced open door.

The Lord's interest in the state of His people is again declared by the word, often considered in the previous

pages, "I know thy works." Nothing escapes His eye; and here indeed, as in the Canticles, He has come into His garden to eat His pleasant fruits. The features mentioned may not seem, at first sight, so greatly attractive; and yet it is these feeble expressions of the power of the Spirit that delight the heart of Christ.

(1) "Thou hast a little strength." Notwithstanding that the Lord has only commendation to give to the angel of Philadelphia, there is no display of power and energy, as in Pentecostal days. The time for this, indeed, had long since passed, and now feebleness, or little power, marked the condition of Philadelphian saints. It was of necessity so (we speak of Philadelphia prophetical rather than the historical assembly), for while it is complete and corporate, it yet, considering its co-existence with Thyatira and Sardis, must have a remnant character. The natural mind, and even godly souls, when uninstructed in the Word, long for the exhibition of power as in days of old; but let all such learn, from this divine communication, that, within the circle of that condition that meets the Lord's mind, there never can be anything else than "a little strength."

(2) "Thou hast kept my word." This is the feature that ever delights the heart of our blessed Lord; and a feature, above all others, that distinguishes moral state. This may be seen from another scripture: "If a man love me, he will keep my word*," etc. (John xiv. 23.) Keeping His word means treasuring it up in the heart so that it moulds, governs, and produces obedience. The term "word," moreover, is very comprehensive: it includes the sum and substance of all the Lord's communications to His people. When therefore He says to the angel of

* It should be "word," and not, as in our translation, "words."

Philadelphia, "Thou hast kept my word," He signifies that His people prized it as their greatest treasure, and that they were individually governed by, and in subjection to it; and that consequently He had His rightful place of supremacy in their hearts and in their service. Would that there were more collective purpose of heart to win the same blessing and the same approval!

(3) "And hast not denied my name." "Name," as is usual in Scripture, is the expression of what Christ is, as revealed to His people, and will include therefore the truth of His person and work, as well as His authority, as set forth by His full title, "Lord Jesus Christ." It is somewhat remarkable that it should be put in a negative form; but it was, and is, no small thing to find, in the midst of declension, and even surrender of the truths of redemption, if not apostasy, those who were collectively keeping the Lord's word and not denying His name. The remnant in the midst of apostate Israel in the days of Ahab are described in a similar manner, as those who had not bowed the knee to Baal. To borrow another's language: "It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything."

It is to the angel of this assembly in this condition that the Lord says, "I have set before thee an opened* door, and no man can shut it." This implies, as we gather, that wherever the condition here indicated is found, the Lord opens for His servants a door—a door for His testimony and service, and a door which He will

* So it should be given. It is not a door standing open, but one that the Lord has opened. It would have been closed had He not opened it.

keep open, whatever the hostile efforts to close it. It was so in the Lord's own service in the midst of Israel. To the outward eye, He had but little strength; He was crucified in (ἐκ) weakness, He lived by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. He truly did not deny His Father's name, and there was ever before Him, 'spite of the craft, malice, and enmity of man, an opened door. To Him the porter opened; and so now to all who, in any measure, possess the moral characteristics here given. We never therefore need to be anxious about open doors for service; our only concern should be to be in the state to be used, and then a door will always be opened, even though there be many adversaries.

Promises follow. The first concerns their ecclesiastical surroundings: "*Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*" (*v.* 9. Compare Isaiah lx. 14.) Who, then, are these claiming to be Jews? There can be little doubt that they are "those who found religion on ordinances and not on Christ," those who are governed by traditions and ecclesiastical usages, and not by the word of God, those who make an "ecclesiastical pretension to a successional God-established religion." Not that these say, in so many words, that they are Jews, but they do in effect, for they distinctly take Jewish ground in their sacerdotal orders, robes, rites, ceremonies, and temples, or "sacred" buildings. And these have always been, when the law permitted, the active persecutors of those who, refusing the old traditions and usages, have sought to be guided alone by the word of God; and, when restrained, they have treated them with contumely and scorn. They claim, through apostolic

succession from Peter, who was the Jewish apostle, the apostle of the circumcision, to be the divinely established church; but it is of these the Lord says, they are "of the synagogue of Satan," not exactly *are* it, but *of* it; they belong to the synagague which is morally under Satan's power.

In this day all such as are prominently before the world occupy in the world's eye the place of the church, while those who with a little strength seek to keep the word of Christ, and not deny His name, are, if noticed, despised; but the time is coming when these relative positions will be reversed, and when those who are now exalted by their pretensions shall come and "worship" before the feet of Philadelphia, and know that she has been the object of the Lord's love.

Such comfort does the Lord administer to His true-hearted and afflicted people! It was His own path, contemned by the religious leaders of His people, yea, rejected and crucified. Now He is the exalted One, and they will one day have to bow the knee at the name of Jesus, and with their tongues confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We have, in the next place, a promise of another sort: "*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*" (*v.* 10.) The meaning of "the word of my patience" may be gathered from chapter i. 9. John describes himself as "your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ." The whole of the present interval is the time of Christ's patience, for He waits at the right hand of God until His enemies shall be made His footstool; and He has taught His people this,

"and given the word that in teaching directs the path and spirit and conduct of him that waits. They wait with Christ according to the word of His patience." This is a most blessed state of soul, for, unless we remember the character of the present moment, we are tempted to be impatient in the presence of the activities and power of evil; but once call in the thought of Christ quietly waiting, and the fact that the longer He waits the more extended will be the day of grace, our souls being encouraged will find rest in communion with Him. For this reason it was that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that the Lord would direct their "hearts into the love of God, and into the patience * of Christ." (2 Thess. iii. 5.)

Philadelphia had enjoyed communion with the Lord in keeping the word of His patience; and, as an incentive to perseverance in this path, He ministers the suited promise that He would keep her "from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." This "hour of trial," of which the Lord speaks, is not the unparalleled sorrows of which we read in Matt. xxiv., concerning which He says, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (*v.* 22.) This is the Jewish tribulation, connected with Antichrist, and confined to Jerusalem and Judæa; but the hour of temptation of our scripture (coincident as to time possibly, and even springing from similar causes, inasmuch as the head of the Western Empire and Antichrist will be associated) is to come "upon the whole habitable world." The object of this permitted trial is "to try them that dwell upon the earth." This

* "Patient waiting" is a paraphrase; the word is really "patience" or "endurance."

does not mean the inhabitants of the earth: it is a moral expression to denote those who, as in Philippians iii., mind earthly things, those, in fact, who, having refused God's testimony, have their thoughts, affections, and desires confined to, and bounded by, this present world.

But it is asked, Will not all God's people, the whole church rather, be kept from this hour of trial? Undoubtedly so, for indeed it will not arrive until after the church is caught away to be for ever with the Lord. But the point is, as also in some respects in all the promises to the overcomers, that the needed encouragement for the saints in their special circumstances is thus ministered. The Lord had spoken of the word of His patience which the angel of Philadelphia had kept; and from this we gather, that this assembly existed, or, if we speak of prophetical Philadelphia, does exist, in the presence of a large display of the power of evil; and this called for, and through grace they had exhibited, much patience in intelligent fellowship with their Lord. It was to the saints in these circumstances the Lord gave this promise, wherein He reminded them that the time was coming when there would be an universal and almost unhindered display of evil; but they should be kept out of it, because they were keeping the word of His patience. Thereby He ministered present sustainment and consolation to their hearts, in reminding them that in this future season of fiery trial they would have found their eternal joy in His own presence.

Still further encouragement follows—"*Behold,* I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" (*v.* 11.) This assembly is surrounded with evil of every kind. Jezebel holds undisputed sway in

* The word "behold" should be omitted.

Thyatira, Sardis has a name to live and is dead, is corporately characterized by lifeless profession; and hence it needs no small fidelity and energy to cleave to the Lord and His truth in such circumstances. There are many seasons, in such a time as the present, when the subtle temptation presents itself, Is it any longer possible to maintain the honour of the Lord and His truth? With all that calls itself Christian in opposition, might it not be better to pursue an individual path? It is to meet this wile of the enemy that the Lord utters these words. He knows and sees the stress of the conflict; and, as beholding it, He would cheer His faithful ones in the prospect of His coming to maintain the struggle, even until their hands, like the hand of Eleazar the son of Dodo, are weary, and cleave to their swords. The force of the words is, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what thou hast until I come, that no man take thy crown," the crown of My approbation and smile. It is as if one saw a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a spar, and cried, "Hold on, I am coming!" Blessed Lord, Thou seest the difficulties of Thine own in keeping Thy word, and not denying Thy name! Thou knowest all their feebleness, and how they are nearly overwhelmed by the rising waters around. Keep them therefore ever in recollection of this word, that Thou art coming quickly, and thus strengthen their faith, and encourage their hearts. Only thus will they be kept from losing their crown.

We have next the promise to the overcomer: "*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new*

name." (*v.* 12.) The character of the overcoming in this assembly is specially to be observed. There is no evil indicated to be withstood and overcome; it is not even perseverance in fidelity that is urged upon the saints, even at the cost of a martyr's death, as in Smyrna; but overcoming here is simply *maintaining*. "Hold that fast which thou hast;" "him that overcometh," that is, in holding fast, "will I make a pillar," etc.

It will also be noticed that the promise to the overcomer has reference to Philadelphia's present condition. Here, it has little strength; the Lord would make the overcomer "a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out"—stability and permanence marking his condition in contrast with feebleness here, and transitoriness. Here, keeping the word of Christ constituted the overcomer's crown, above with Christ, he should have written upon him "the name of my God," the expression of all that God is as revealed in Christ, and unfolded in His word; "and the name of the city of my God, new Jerusalem," the display of God's glory in the church in her glorified condition (see Rev. xxi. 10); "and my new name," for here the overcomer had not denied the name of Christ. My *new* name, "the name not known to prophets and Jews, according to the flesh, but which He has taken as dead to this world (where the false assembly settles down), and risen into heavenly glory." It is intimate association with Christ, as shown from the repetition of the word "My," in every variety of His heavenly glory—in His own relationship to God, to the church in her public display in glory as the dwelling-place of God, and in His own personal glorified condition as Man at the right hand of God.

The proclamation, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear*

what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (*v.* 13), closes the epistle: and well might we, in the presence of this gracious communication, unite in fervent supplication, both for the hearing ear, and the understanding heart.

(7) LAODICEA.

(*vv.* 14–22.)

Everything which God has entrusted to man in responsibility has utterly failed. Adam in paradise, Noah in the new earth, Israel under law, the priesthood, prophets, and kings—all alike failed in their several positions. The church, alas! is no exception to the general rule; for in Laodicea we behold its final condition as estimated by Him whose eyes, as He walked in the midst of the seven candlesticks, were as a flame of fire. And, again, it should be remembered that the root of the state of this assembly is found in Ephesus—in the loss of her "first love." It was there the decline commenced, and, whatever the gracious interventions of God to recover His people, this decline continued, expressing itself, as we have seen, in various and widely-different forms, until at length the limits of divine forbearance are reached, and the Lord declares His unalterable purpose of "spueing" the church, as the vessel of testimony, out of His mouth. He finally rejects, as His witness, that which bears His name on the earth.

It is this hopeless, and now irremediable, condition of Laodicea which accounts for the special characters the Lord assumes in His presentation: *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans* write; These things saith the*

* As a great deal has been made of the use of this word, it may be mentioned that the correct reading is *Laodicea*, and not, as in our version, *Laodiceans*.

Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." (Rev. iii. 14.) All these characters express what the church should have been for God in the world; but, having falsified every one of them, and thus become a false witness, the Lord presents Himself as the One in whom they have all been verified and secured. God will have His glory maintained. He will permit His people to have the privilege of making it good; but on their failure, He will Himself vindicate His own name. (1) First, then, Christ is the "Amen." The key to the meaning of this word may be found in 2 Cor. i., where we read, "For all the promises of God in Him" (the Son of God, Jesus Christ) "are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (*v.* 20.) That is, in Him is the affirmation, and in Him is the confirmation, of the truth of all that God has spoken. So here the Lord, as the Amen, presents Himself as "the fulfilment and the verifier of all the promises of God." The church, we repeat, should have been this, but, having forgotten her heavenly calling, and the source of her power and blessing, she has found a home in a scene where the Lord Himself was rejected, and has, in this way, become the denial of, instead of being the Amen to, the promises of God. (2) Connected with being the Amen, Christ is also the faithful and true witness; and He was that both concerning God and man. Here it is probably in the former aspect He is seen, as God's faithful and true witness. This, as before noticed, is, from the very figure of the golden candlestick found in the first chapter, what the church was intended to be in this world. The apostle Paul therefore, writing to the Corinthian assembly, says, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ." (2 Cor. iii. 3.) But how could an assembly that, in its own estimation, was

rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, be the faithful and true witness of Him who, when down here, had not where to lay His head? (3) He was, moreover, "the beginning of the creation of God." Adam, the responsible man, was the beginning of the first creation; but in the cross of Christ the first man came to his end before God, he was for ever judged and set aside, and has been once and for all superseded by the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. As soon as Christ came into the world He was the second Man; but He did not take the place until He was risen from the dead, the Head now of a new race, as well as the Head of His body the church. It is Christ, therefore, as risen and glorified, who is the beginning of the creation of God, and it is to Him in this condition that the church, the church which is His body, is united by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and hence it is that the church "ought to have displayed the power of the new creation by the Holy Ghost; as if any man is in Christ it is a new creation, where all things are of God." Instead of that, as Laodicea testifies, she has become the expression of her own importance, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness. What an immense consolation then it is, in such a state of things, to look upward and to find that, while everything has slipped from our grasp, to our own shame and confusion of face, God finds the perfect answer to all His own thoughts of grace, and has secured all for His own beloved people, in Christ.

The condition and judgment of Laodicea are now given —"*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*" (*vv.* 15, 16.) Though bearing the name of Christ, and presenting itself in the world as the church, such was its moral condition, the

principal feature of which was indifference, springing from the want of heart for Christ, and expressing itself in that spurious charity which regards all "religious" beliefs as alike good, provided there be sincerity. There is consequently lukewarmness, no zeal for Christ, and no hatred of sin; but a mild self-complacent toleration of all, and of all things; and connected therewith the substitution of humanity for Christ, and, as a consequence, philanthropy for religion. As has been written long ago, "It would not renounce Christ, would keep up profession, but would sacrifice nothing for Him, it would keep the church's place and credit, yea, claim it largely on many grounds as a body; but spiritual power, in individual association of heart with Christ or trouble for Him, was gone."

Such was the condition of Laodicea as discerned, and infallibly discerned, by Christ; and it was nauseous to Him; He abhorred it, and therefore declares irrevocably that He will spue it out of His mouth. He does not say when He will do so; but the decree has gone forth from His lips, and will never be recalled. Its meaning is, that He will totally, and for ever, reject the assembly as His public witness, His responsible light-bearer in the world. This is its primary application; but surely every individual believer may learn, both for instruction and warning, that nothing, no state or condition, is so displeasing to Christ as lukewarmness or indifference.

The Lord, in the next place, exposes the cause of the condition He condemns, and, though He has pronounced judgment, He indicates the remedy: "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,*

and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*" (*vv.* 17, 18.) As may be gathered from Deut. viii., and other scriptures, the danger in the wilderness for God's people is that of murmuring and unbelief, the danger in the land, when surrounded with blessings, is that of self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. It is into this latter danger that Laodicea has fallen. Possessing all the light of the word of God, and familiar with the spiritual blessings which are the church's ackowledged portion, she forgets the source of her wealth, and ascribes all to herself. It is *she* who is rich and increased with goods, and has need of nothing. In other words, she makes everything of man, and nothing of Christ—save to use His name for her own exaltation. "In Laodicea, all that they professed to have, all that man could estimate the value of, was false and human. I do not mean mere outward riches, but all that could give a larger pretension to wisdom and knowledge and learning, perhaps a pretended fuller view of Christianity itself."

And what, beloved reader, exists to-day as the counterpart of this description? Nay, what is it that will finally form Laodicea? It is, in one word, *rationalism*—that rationalism which is current under the name of Broad church theology, and which, daily on the increase, occupies a large place in the Anglican establishment, and has almost completely flooded whole fields of Dissent. For the teachers of this school bend all their efforts to eradicate the distinctive truths of Christianity; to

* This should read rather, "And eyesalve to anoint thine eyes." The eyesalve must be "bought" of Christ, equally with the gold and the white raiment.

rehabilitate the first man, notwithstanding he has for ever been judicially set aside in the cross of Christ; and they are never weary of proclaiming that the light of reason, of their own minds, is all-sufficient to guide them, both in deciding what is the word of God, and also in their journey through the mazes of this world. It is their perpetual boast that they are enriched with all the accumulated treasures of the science, philosophy, and civilization of the nineteenth century. Yea, truly, according to their own estimate, they have need of nothing!

But what is the estimate of Christ? He says, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and, more than this, He says that Laodicea does not know that she is in this miserable plight. What a difference between the thoughts of Christ and those of this assembly! *She* claims superior knowledge! *He* says she is utterly ignorant! *She* revels in her fancied wealth and possessions! *He* says that she does not possess one single thing. Which estimate then are we to accept? Remember, dear reader, in answering this question, that the Lord had surveyed this assembly with eyes that were as a flame of fire, testing and penetrating into the real character of everything that met His gaze. Remember, too, that it is He into whose hands all judgment has been committed. Can you doubt then which is the true verdict? When will souls learn that man as man is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? And this assembly, by its vain self-sufficiency, her self-importance fed with pretended light from human sources, had got "off the ground of Christianity, and on to that of the world or natural man;" and hence her sad and lamentable condition.

Nothing could show out more fully the Lord's tender grace and long-suffering than the counsel He gives to Laodicea under these circumstances. She has turned wholly away from Christ, except in profession; and yet He would fain draw her attention to Himself as her only source of recovery. Let us then look at what He so graciously proffers. There are three things—"Gold tried in the fire"—a well-known symbol of divine righteousness, which in Christ, as has been remarked by another, is never separated from life; "white raiment," which, as may be seen from chapter xix., sets forth the righteousnesses of saints, the fruit of the power of the Spirit following upon the possession of, and upon the becoming, God's righteousness in Christ; and the "eye-salve," or unction of the Holy One (1 John ii. 20), which is the only source of spiritual perception and intelligence. The exhortation "to buy" these things of Christ will be readily understood in the light of other scriptures. (See Isaiah lv. 1; Matthew xxv. 9, 10.) It is simply a figure of grace, buying "without money and without price."

Concerning the significance of this counsel of the Lord, we transcribe the following words: "They are the divine gifts and power of Christianity *in contrast* with what man possesses as man, with that of which he can say, 'Gain to *me*'—man's conscious possession of that which gives importance and value to man in his own mind. . . . What was wholly wanting was what was divine and new in man. . . . They are specifically divine things connected with man's rejection and acceptance in Christ alone, to be had only in Christ and from Christ, and nowhere else: not an improvement of man, but what was divine, found in and obtained from Christ."*

* *Collected Writings of J. N. D.*, vol. ii., "Expository," p. 524.

Down to the end of verse 18, the Lord addresses the angel of Laodicea. In verse 19, in view of the possibility of individual believers being found in this corrupt assembly, He announces a general principle of His dealing with His people, and then, as standing outside, appeals for admittance to anyone who should hear His voice. The principle then is, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*" (*v.* 19.) That this principle is applicable to those in relationship with Christ (compare Job v. 17, 18; Proverbs iii. 11, 12; Amos iii. 2; Hebrews xii. 5–8, &c.) will scarcely be questioned. It lies indeed at the foundation of God's governmental ways with His people in this world, and hence the exhortation, "Be zealous therefore, and repent." The Lord thus warns any of His people, as well as those who were only professors, that His rod was already lifted up, and that, unless there were repentance, He must let it fall for chastening and rebuke. Precisely the same thing is seen in the discipline He exercises at His table. "If," says the apostle, "we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged;" and again, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.) It is therefore out of the tenderness, out of the love of His own heart, that this warning proceeds. He never afflicts willingly; but if His people continued deaf to His entreaties and appeals, He loves them too well to allow them to pass on unrebuked and without chastening.

In the next verse we have, first, the position which the state of Laodicea has compelled Him to assume: "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.*" The church on earth is God's habitation through the Spirit, and yet we find in this scripture that Christ is constrained by the condition

into which it has fallen to be outside.* Judgment is not yet executed; He has not yet spued it out of His mouth; but He has taken His place outside. So also we read in the Gospel of Matthew that, immediately on His passing judgment upon the temple, and Judaism, in the words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," He "went out, and departed from the temple." (Matt. xxiii. 38; xxiv. 1.) It is the same with Laodicea; it has become man's house, not God's—a testimony therefore, not to Christ, but to man's own importance and self-sufficiency. In sorrow, and, as we know from the analogous case of the departure of the glory from the temple (Ezekiel x., xi.), reluctantly, the Lord, unable to bear longer, consistently with what He is, with the moral corruption and perversion of the truth, which had become associated on earth with His holy name, will go forth, and for ever take His place outside the professing church. And let it not be overlooked that, even though Laodicea may not, so far, be fully developed,† the Lord may act in this manner, even now, in respect of individual assemblies. If one of these falls morally into correspondence with Laodicea the Lord could not sanction it by His presence in the midst, for in such a case the saints could no longer be said to be gathered unto His name.

If, however, the Lord has definitely taken His place

* Remembering the candlestick character of the assembly here, this interpretation may perhaps be questioned. But while it is true that He is outside the hearts of those addressed, seeking admittance, it is also to be remembered that Christ is not within Laodicea, for in no sense could it now be said to be God's habitation through the Spirit.

† In fact, though that which will form Laodicea is plainly seen on every hand, the actual time of its full presentation *as Laodicea* is not stated, nor when it will be spued out of the Lord's mouth. See *Introduction*.

outside of Laodicea, He has not abandoned any of His own who, failing to discern that the Lord has departed, may still be inside. Hence He says, "Behold, I stand at the door, *and knock.*" Full of long-suffering and grace, He waits upon any who may have been carried away by the seductions around them, lulled to sleep by the atmosphere in which they have been living, and with urgent appeals seeks to arouse them out of their lethargy. He thus stands at the door, the door closed upon Himself, and knocks, if perchance any true-hearted but slothful saint, like the bride in the Canticles (chap. v.), may respond. Should there be even one such who shall hear His voice and open the door, He says, "*I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*" (*v.* 20.) The order of the possible response is to be observed. There is first hearing His voice—His call to repentance—and then opening the door. Now the bride heard His voice, but lacked the energy to open the door until it was too late. It is not enough, therefore, to hear His voice; many believers, found, alas! in evil associations, do this, but remain where they are; and so it may be with saints in Laodicea, unless, indeed, in His mercy the Lord lays hold of them, as the angels did Lot in Sodom, and compels them to open the door.

The door being opened ("if any man . . . . open the door"), how rich the blessing realized. First, "I will come in to him"—not into Laodicea; its doom is sealed; but in to him, to him who, by grace, had opened the door. And coming in He will manifest all His grace. "I will sup with him"; that is, "I will come down to where he is, and have fellowship with him in his things." How wondrous His condescension! But if He first will sup with him who has opened the door, it is that He may lead

him up into the higher blessedness of supping with Himself, of having fellowship with Him in His things, communion with Himself, the most exalted privilege, though intended for every saint, and the most blissful enjoyment, that any can possess whether in time or in eternity; for it is the realization of our perfect association with Christ.

The promise to the overcomer is of a very different character from that in Philadelphia. It is, "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.*" (*v.* 21.) Overcoming here would be hearing the voice of Christ, and opening the door to Him; for this involves a judgment of the Laodicean condition, and separation from it morally. Every one then, thus overcoming, should sit with Christ in His throne. He Himself had overcome (see John xii. 31, xvi. 33, though this be not all that He overcame), and was set down with His Father in His throne; and, in like manner, the overcomer in Laodicea should sit with Him in His throne. It is promised association with Himself in the public display of glory in the kingdom. Infinite grace surely, and yet a very different character of blessedness from the intimate and heavenly association with Himself promised to the Philadelphian overcomer. Both alike are the gifts of His grace, but the gifts are manifestly in relation to the path and testimony of each while upon the earth, in the scene of the Lord's rejection.

Finally, as in the three previous communications, the proclamation to him that "*hath an ear*" closes the letter. And this proclamation is still sounded out, with increased energy, among the people of God. Oh! that it might both find and create many an opened ear, that, the hearers

rousing themselves from their supineness, and indifference may listen to "*what the Spirit saith unto the churches*," and that, through grace, they may receive strength to judge all they are connected with by the unerring standard of the living Word; so that, taking their place apart from the evil, they may have the girded loins and the burning lights while awaiting the Lord's return.*

* It is to be particularly observed that there is no allusion to the coming of Christ in this letter. The reason may be that, as stated in the Introduction, while the Lord may morally reject that which will constitute Laodicea at the rapture of the saints, He may not execute His public judgment upon it till after the saints are with Himself, just as Jerusalem was not publicly judged for more than thirty years after Pentecost. He will then let the world see that He has removed His candlestick.

CHAPTER IV.

A DISTINCT section of this book commences with this chapter. When John was in the Spirit on the Lord's-day, he was commanded "to write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter," or more accurately, "the things which shall be after these." (Chap. i. 19.) The first chapter contains the things he saw, the second and third chapters comprise "the things which are;" *i.e.*, the whole church period, and in chapter iv. we enter upon the things "after these"; *i.e.*, after the church period on earth. This interpretation is borne out by the language employed in the first verse of our chapter: "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter"; literally, "after these," the very words found in chap. i. 19. To miss this divine division of the book is to lose the key to its understanding.

Two prefatory remarks must be made to enable the reader to commence intelligently the study of this part of the inspired Word. The first is, that while we have no account here of the rapture of the saints, of the church being caught away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. iv.), the church is yet seen in heaven. It is quite true that the twenty-four elders may include other saints than members of the body of Christ (this will be explained afterwards); but the church, if with others, is represented by the elders, and is therefore no longer on earth. It does

not fall in with the purpose of this book to state the period of, or to describe, the rapture; it is nevertheless supposed. Laodicea might be still on earth, whatever the name she may have assumed, but all true believers (Christians), are, when the fourth chapter opens, above with the Lord.

The second thing to be observed is, that John's point of view, standpoint, is changed. In chapter i. he is on earth, and he saw, in a vision, Christ, "like unto the Son of man," on earth, in the midst of the seven churches, examining, judicially examining, their state, and setting forth, in the seven epistles, His infallible judgment of their condition, together with suited encouragements, warnings, and promises. Here John beholds "*a door opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard, as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither,*" etc. It is from heaven, the only true place of vision, he is to view and describe the events which are to take place on the earth.

It may further be remarked, that both chapters iv. and v. form a kind of introduction to the various actions and judgments afterwards recorded, laying, as it were, the foundation on which all proceeds, or giving the ground on which God resumes His dealings with the earth, both with Israel and the Gentiles, in judgment.

The moral connection between verses 1 and 2 is exceedingly beautiful. John had received the command, "Come up hither"; and He who gave the command bestowed, as ever, the requisite power for compliance with it. He tells us, "*And immediately I was in the Spirit.*" This expression will indicate, as pointed out in chapter i., that John, similarly to Paul in 2 Cor. xii., was rapt away, in the power of the Spirit, from earth and earthly scenes,

and that for the time he was so characterized by the Spirit that he would be unconscious of bodily existence. Whether in the body or out of the body he would not know, and thus there would be nothing to impede his reception of these divinely given visions. He was in this way qualified to become the vessel of these revelations.

Thereon he proceeds to describe what he saw: "*And, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*" (*vv.* 2, 3.)

The first thing that John saw, when in the Spirit, was a throne. Our translation does not exactly express the sense of the original. It is not that a throne was "set" for the occasion, as might be supposed, but rather that a throne "stood" in heaven; and it was the throne as standing there that met the gaze of John. The idea of government is necessarily associated with a throne. The government of the earth, from the day that judgment had been executed upon the kingdom, the metropolis of which was Jerusalem, had been committed to the Gentiles. (See Daniel ii.) But God never abdicated His rights, or ceased to govern by His providence the nations of the earth. (Daniel iv. 24–35.) He had retired from His throne in the midst of Israel, but His throne was fixed in heaven, and from that throne He not only "ruled in the kingdom of men, and gave it to whomsoever He would," but also as a consequence He held those to whom He had committed the government responsible to Himself. If Israel had failed, and if, with greater privileges, greater light, and more power, the church has failed as God's witness and light-bearer on the earth, so also have the Gentile

depositaries of power. In chapter ii. and iii. we have seen Christ judging the church, and we have heard His final sentence—that He would utterly reject it as His vessel of testimony. In this chapter the preparation for the judgment of the world—the nations—comes before us, and hence the first thing noticed is God's stable and righteous throne.

There is also one sitting on the throne, and His appearance, the apostle tells us, was "*like a jasper and a sardine stone.*" In chapter xxi. we read that the New Jerusalem, when she descends out of heaven from God, has "the glory of God," and that her light—that is, the light of this glory—is "like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone." (*vv.* 10, 11.) It is interesting also to notice that in the breastplate of the Jewish high priest the sardius (sardine) was the first and the jasper the last of the precious stones (Ex. xxviii.), these two including, as it were, all the rest.* More cannot be said than that these two stones are divinely chosen as emblems of the glory of God, as displayed in His righteous government according to what He is, for it is this glory John was permitted to behold.

The next feature is the rainbow round about the throne, in sight like an emerald. How gracious of God to remind His servant, just as He is about to unfold the long series of judgments wherewith He will smite the earth, of His everlasting covenant with this creation! (Gen. ix.) In the midst of His wrath He will remember mercy. This rainbow too is in appearance like unto an emerald, significant, it may be, of the fact that the issue of all God's dealings

* Both are also found in the twelve foundations of the heavenly city; but here the jasper comes first (the glory being at the beginning, so to speak, instead of at the end, as in Judaism) and the sardius the sixth.

with the world will be seen in the eternal freshness and beauty of that new earth, together with the new heavens, of which John speaks in chapter xxi.

Another thing the apostle pauses to describe before proceeding, "*And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones:** *and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*" (*v.* 4.) Who then are the elders? Two things mark them—white raiment and crowns of gold. The first of these things speaks of their priestly character (Exodus xxviii. 39–43, &c.), and the second as plainly tells of their royal dignity. In one word, they are those who through association with Christ (though not yet in display) are kings and priests. John himself, when he breaks forth in adoration in the name of the saints, uses these two terms.† The reason for the number twenty-four is found in 1 Chronicles xxiv. 1–4. When David distributed the priests into courses he found there were twenty-four heads of the priestly families, and hence there were that number of courses; and these twenty-four heads were consequently representative of the whole priesthood. In like manner the twenty-four elders (the principle being known in Scripture) are taken to represent, not only the saints of this period, but also the saints (all who are Christ's) who share in the first resurrection. For it should ever be borne in mind that, while only believers since Pentecost are members of the body of Christ, He will yet call out of their graves, on His return, all the saints of every previous dispensation.

* The word is really thrones, and not "seats."

† We do not here enter upon the question of readings, whether "kings" or "kingdom" is to be preferred. The truth remains the same. (Rev. i. 5, 6.)

It should moreover be noted that the elders are "round about" the throne.* It follows from the note cited below that the elders are more intimately than any connected with the throne; and remembering that they themselves are seated on thrones, we understand at once the wondrous position of favour and exaltation which they occupy in this scene. This would be unintelligible to us did we not know that, according to the counsels of our God, we have already been brought, through the death and resurrection of Christ, into the acceptance of Christ Himself before Him. And it is this fact alone that explains to us the possibility of the elders sitting in peace around what is really a throne of judgment, and while there proceeded out of it "*lightnings and thunderings and voices*," ever in this book the heralds and accompaniments of the display of God's judicial power. (See chapters x. 3, xi. 19, xvi. 18, &c.)

There were also "*seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.*" (*vv.* 5, 6.) The number seven characterizes the Holy Spirit in this book (see chaps. i. 4, iii. 1, v. 6), symbolic, that is, of the fulness or plenitude of the Spirit's power in the connection indicated. In the next chapter, the Lamb is said to have "seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"—a figure expressive of perfect intelligence in the government of the earth according to God. But here it is seven lamps of fire burning, not on the earth, but before the throne. Fire expresses, as constantly, the holiness of God in judgment, and we learn therefore that

* The word given here as "round about" is not the same as is translated in the same way in verse 6. The following note will explain the difference: "I use 'round' (the word in verse 4) for what is connected with anything —I do not say united to—as a centre, as the tire of a wheel; 'around' (the word in verse 6) for what is standing as a circle outside, around anything."

the judgments which God is about to execute will be in the perfection of the power of the Spirit, according to the immutable standard of the holiness of the divine nature. What a difference from the present power and activity of the Holy Ghost in the Church, or from His power in testimony to the world through the gospel! This feature alone should have preserved any from confounding "the things that are" with the "things after these."

With respect to the sea of glass like unto crystal, it has been significantly remarked, "No altar of sacrifice is in view, as if it were a time of approach; the brazen laver has glass instead of water. It is a fixed, accomplished holiness, not a cleansing of feet." The door indeed has been shut (Matt. xxv.), the Holy Spirit has departed with the church, and consequently is above, and not below; and the interval between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ in glory is therefore for the prophetic world marked, not by grace, but by judgment.

Another thing meets the eyes of the rapt apostle: "*And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts,* full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*" (*vv.* 6–8.)

* This word is entirely different from that translated "beast" in chapter xiii., etc. In these cases it is properly "beast," setting forth the embodiment of the evil energies of man; but in our chapter it is simply living things or creatures: and thus "living creatures" (as in Ezekiel i., etc.) will be used in speaking of these cherubic forms of existence.

The reader will be interested in comparing these living creatures with the seraphim in Isaiah vi., with the cherubim in the tabernacle and temple, and also with the cherubim in Ezekiel i. and x., and in noting their characteristic differences. The following remarks will aid in the examination: "They (the living creatures) have some of the characters of the cherubim, some of the seraphim, but somewhat different from both. They were full of eyes, before and behind, to see all things according to God, and within; having also six wings, perfect in inward perception, but given perception, and in the celerity of their motions. They embraced also the four species of creation in the ordered earth—man, cattle, beast of the field, fowl of the air—these symbolizing the powers or attributes of God, themselves worshipped by the heathen, here only the instruments of the throne. Him who sat on it the heathen knew not. The intelligence, firmness, power, rapidity of execution, which belong to God, were typified as elsewhere by them. They are symbols. Divers agents may be the instruments of their activity. But though there was the general analogy of the cherubim—judicial and governmental power—these had a peculiar character. . . . The symbols used here become clearer through these cases (in the tabernacle, Isaiah, and Ezekiel). The living creatures are in and around the throne; for it is a throne of executory judgment, with the attributes of cherubim united to it. But it is not, as in Israel, mere earthly providential judgment—a whirlwind out of the north. (Ezekiel i. 4.) There is before us the government of all the earth, and executory judgment according to the holiness of God's nature."*

Such are the living creatures; and their occupation,

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. iv. pp. 499, 500.

as given here, is that of incessant praise—praising God according to the revelation of Himself in the Old Testament—namely, as Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come; the eternal God, who ever *is*—and embraces all the past, and all the future in His ever-present and blessed existence. It is to Him the living creatures unceasingly cry, Holy, holy, holy. They celebrate what He is in Himself.

When, moreover, they "*give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" (*vv.* 9–11.) It has been remarked "that the living creatures only celebrate and declare; the elders worship with understanding." All God's works will praise Him; but it is only the redeemed who have the mind of Christ, and can, through the Holy Spirit, enter into and have fellowship with the things of God, whether in grace or in judgment. When, therefore, God is praised by the living creatures, the elders "are all activity, own all glory to be His, are prostrate on their faces, and cast their crowns before Him, *more blessed in owning His glory than in possessing their own.*" And the last words of their adoration show clearly the ground taken in this chapter. They praise Him as the Creator, and express their sense of His consequent sovereign claims over all His creatures. It was His will alone that called them into being, and it was by reason of His will alone they continued to exist. Thus, dependent on their Creator, they are surely amenable to Him for judgment.

CHAPTER V.

IF in chapter iv. God is celebrated as the Lord God Almighty, and as worthy to receive glory and honour and power as the sovereign Creator, in this chapter it is the Lamb who is worshipped, and who is proclaimed with adoration to be the worthy One because of His suffering death, and the redemption He thereby has wrought. Every word of the chapter is consequently replete with instruction.

First, John records: "*And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*" (*v.* 1.) It should be observed that, while God is seated on the throne, and John speaks of the character of His glory (chap. iv.), and even of His right hand, there is yet not a word used inconsistent with the fact that "God is a Spirit." We are made to feel that He is sitting on the throne, rather than permitted to see Him. The book, written within and on the back, would be like the ordinary rolls of those days, written on both sides; and its being sealed with seven seals imports that it was perfectly sealed, its contents unknown, because shut up by divine power. It is undoubtedly the book of God's counsels respecting the earth, not His eternal counsels, but His purposes, not yet unfolded or made good, concerning the world.

The book thus introduced, a strong angel appears on the scene, and cries with a loud voice, challenging, as it were, the whole universe, "*Who is worthy to open the book,*

and to loose the seals thereof?" There was no response to the challenge; for, in truth, there was not one, from Gabriel downwards, of all God's creatures, who had the requisite qualification to undertake the task. John, on this account, wept much because no man ("no one") was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. (*vv.* 2–4.) Then one of the elders—not the angel, remark, but one of the elders—for it is these alone who possess the intelligence of God and of His ways (compare chap. vii. 13, 14), said unto him, "*Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.*" (*v.* 5.) It is the Messiah of prophecy who is thus indicated, though, as we shall see, the Messiah who had been rejected and "slain," and was now, in consequence, exalted to the right hand of power. Jacob had thus spoken: "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" And the very next verse speaks of the coming of Shiloh, unto whom the gathering of the peoples should be. (Gen. xlix. 9, 10.) The Lion of the tribe of Judah, therefore, tells of the irresistible, all-conquering power of Messiah in conflict with His enemies. (Compare Psalm xviii. 37–44); and the "Root of David" sets Him forth rather as David's Lord than as David's Son—the Root here, not the Offspring. In this presentation we have, then, the Messiah in the truth of His divine Person, combined with His victorious power in conflict. John "*beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*" (*v.* 6.) What a contrast between the

thoughts of God and the thoughts of man! "A Lion, the Root of David." What majesty, dignity, visible display of strength, energy, and all-commanding power might we expect to behold! But no; it was a Lamb, and a Lamb as it had been slain! Ah! here is the divine secret of His exaltation, and of His having prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. Let us examine this wonderful exhibition more in detail.

The first thing demanding attention is the position the Lamb occupies. He is here shown as the prominent object in heaven—God's object, and the object of all those who surround the throne. As we therefore contemplate Him as the all-absorbing object of heaven, in the measure in which He is the object of our hearts, we are in communion with the mind of God. The privilege thus is ours of delighting in Him in whom God delights. But, more exactly, the Lamb is seen to be the central object of the throne. He is in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders. As it has been interpreted, "The rejected Messiah was in the midst of the divine throne, and within all the displays of providence and grace," as exemplified respectively by the four living creatures and the elders.

In the next place, His characteristics are to be considered. He has seven horns. A horn is the emblem of power, and we thus learn that He possesses (it is a question of earth now, not heaven) all power, the perfection of power, over the earth; and the seven eyes proclaim His perfect intelligence, wielded in the power of the Spirit, for the government of the earth according to God. And let it be repeated, that the fact of His having been slain, whereby the cross and the throne are connected, constitutes the ground of His present supremacy

and power, as well as His qualification to make good upon the earth in government the purposes of God. He is thus alike the ground and object of all God's ways and purposes.

Having presented to us the Lamb, as it had been slain, and exhibited His perfect qualifications—qualifications acquired through shame, rejection, and death, the action of taking the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne, is described. What a moment for heaven was this! On earth all was confusion and corruption. Man, energized by Satan (we speak of the future it will be remembered), was dominant, rejecting God, and demanding divine honours for himself. (See 2 Thess. ii.) Who could step into such a scene, curb the power of evil, re-assert God's authority, govern the nations righteously, and cause the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea? The answer is here given. It is the slain, but now exalted, Lamb; and He gives the pledge of what He is about to do in taking the book out of the right hand of God.

The significance of His action is understood by heaven; for as soon as He had taken the book, "*the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung* a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us† to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and*

* It should be rather "sing."

† The word "us" should probably be omitted. Still, if so, it is the redeemed represented by the twenty-four elders who are indicated, only they are in the background, because it is the worthiness of the Lamb they celebrate, rather than their own redemptive blessings.

people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*" (*vv.* 8–10.)

In the first place, the living creatures and the elders alike, on the Lamb taking the book, prostrate themselves before Him; and we are told that they all† had harps, and golden "bowls" full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. As yet the harps are silent; for the moment the elders are seen as priests. In what way the prayers of saints are presented through them, or who are the saints spoken of, is not revealed. It is, however, certain that the glorified saints do not need to pray, and it may therefore be well concluded that it is the saints on earth, whose prayers are symbolized by these odours. (Compare chap. vi. 9–11, and chap. viii. 3–5.) May it not be, that the direct intervention of God, while in accordance with His own purposes, is yet in answer to the cry of the suffering remnant upon earth? (See Luke xviii. 7, 8.)

Following upon this action, they celebrate His praise. A new glory of the exalted Lamb being displayed, they sing a new song, the subject of which is His worthiness to open the seals of the book, because of His having been slain, and because of the redemption He had thereby wrought for His people. Let the following striking words explain this: "What seemed His dishonour and rejection on earth was the ground of His worthiness to take the book. He, who at all suffering and cost to Himself had glorified all that God was, was able and worthy to unfold what made it good in the way of government. It was not

* If we omit "us" in the preceding verse, "them" should be read here instead of "us," and "they" for "we" in what follows.

† It is not quite clear whether "every one of them" includes the living creatures. Strictly speaking, as has often been pointed out, "having" applies only to the elders. If so, it would be only the elders who had the harps, and golden vials full of odours.

the government of Israel, but of all the earth; not merely chastisements according to God's revelation of Himself in Israel, but the display in power of all God was in the whole earth. He who had glorified all He was, and redeemed, by the gospel of what He was through His death, out of all the earth, was the fit One to bring it forth in power."* He was therefore not only worthy, but the only worthy One in the universe, to make good on the earth the glory of God, on account of which He had suffered the death of the cross.

But, blessed be His name, He had, through His precious blood which had been shed, redeemed souls to God from every quarter of the globe, and had associated them with Himself as kings and priests to God, assuring them thereby that when He should establish His kingdom, they should reign with Him "over" the earth. What wonder was it, that the contemplation of the worthiness of the Lamb, and of these divine unfoldings of God's glorious ways in grace and power, should bow the hearts of the living creatures and the elders before the Lamb, and call forth such strains of melody, strains that will become the lips of the redeemed throughout eternity? And it is more wonderful still that, with such revelations, the redeemed on earth may, even now, anticipate this eternal occupation, and so find relief to their overcharged hearts in chanting the worthiness of the Lamb.

Another class now appears upon the scene: "*And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and*

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. v., pp. 502-3.

strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." (*vv.* 11, 12.) In reading this response of the angels to the celebration of the worthiness of the Lamb by the elders, it is impossible not to recall the well-known lines—

"Hark! ten thousand voices crying
'Lamb of God!' with one accord;
Thousand thousand saints replying,
Wake at once the echoing chord.

"'Praise the Lamb!' the chorus waking,
All in heaven together throng;
Loud and far each tongue partaking,
Rolls around the endless song.

"Grateful incense this ascending
Ever to the Father's throne;
Every knee to Jesus bending,
All the mind in heaven is one."

And it is so, for the praise of the angels, awakened by the song of the elders, though on another ground, shows the perfect concord of heaven in the adoration of the Lamb.

There are several distinct points to be noticed for the fuller understanding of the scene. It should, then, be observed that these myriads of worshipping angels form, if the words may be used, the outer circle of the heavenly hosts; they are round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders. In the ineffable grace of God, the redeemed, as being in Christ, are brought into a nearer place than the created intelligences that have never fallen from their creature perfectness! This is a well-known truth, but how little do we apprehend it in power. Moreover, the angels, as often remarked, *say*, and do not *sing*, their praises. It is only those who are redeemed, as Scripture everywhere shows, that can utter their praise in song. There are also, it will be seen, seven things they proclaim

the Lamb as worthy to receive; that is, He is worthy to receive *all* things. It is the ascription to Him of all possible exaltation, dominion, and blessing.

Besides this, it has been significantly remarked, "I can hardly doubt that a change in administrative order takes place here. Until the Lamb took the book, they (the angels) were the administrative power;* they were the instruments through which, what the four living creatures symbolized was exercised on earth. 'For unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.' Hence, as soon as the Lamb appears and takes the book, as soon as the idea of redemption is brought in, the living creatures and the elders are brought together, and the angels take their own place apart. Like the living creatures before, they give no reason for their praise."†

The praise, commenced in heaven, descends, and spreads abroad, over, and under, the earth, as well as throughout the sea, until every sentient thing unites in the adoration ascending to "*Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*" (*v* 13.) This is the song of redeemed creation, in unison with the song of heaven, earth being now (here in anticipation) in perfect accord with heaven in the worship of God and the Lamb.‡ Redeemed creation ascribes but four things to the Lamb,

* This may be seen everywhere in the Old Testament, where angels continually appear upon the earth as the executants of God's will.

† *The Synopsis*, vol. v. p. 503.

‡ It is important to distinguish between "under the earth" in Philippians ii. 10 and the same words in verse 13 of our chapter. In truth the phrases in the original are very different. In Philippians infernal beings (demons) are indicated; whereas in Revelation it is merely creatures under the surface of the earth—"on the earth and under the earth" being used to include everything that has life. (See Psalm cl. 6.)

perhaps because four is the symbol of completeness on earth, even as seven, as seen in the angels' celebration, is that of absolute perfection.

The four living creatures add their "*Amen*" to the song of creation, and the elders fall down and worship.‡ They have already offered their vocal praises, and now they are silently on their faces, their hearts filled and overflowing with unutterable adoration.

‡ The words "Him that liveth for ever and ever" should be omitted. The Lamb is the prominent object of the chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE direct action of this part of the book now commences, in accordance with its character, with a series of judgments. Chapters iv. and v. are, as we have seen, preparatory and introductory; they unfold to us the scene in heaven in relation to the events which are about to take place on the earth. Man may sever earth from heaven; but God, spite of the will and evil energies of man, still holds the reins of government, whatever the instruments He may be pleased to employ, in His own hands. To borrow language: "God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man's busy movements; they will accomplish God's. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will."

A striking illustration of this truth is found in the first verse of our chapter. John says: *And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come* [*and see*].* *And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*" (*vv.*

* There is considerable doubt as to the authenticity of the words enclosed in brackets—"and see," as also in verses 3, 5, 7. If accepted, the address is manifestly to John; if omitted, it would hardly be so, though it may be generally to call attention to what follows. Various interpretations have been offered, and some of them very fanciful.

1, 2.) The important point to be observed is, that the coming forth of the white horse on earth is the result of the Lamb opening the seal in heaven. The rider might be acting entirely from his own will, but here we are permitted to see the source of his activity. He might be wholly ignorant of it, but none the less is he the instrument of the divine will. Lust of conquest might be his sole motive, just as it was in the case of Nebuchadnezzar in days of old, only God in His infinite wisdom knows how to make the wrath of man to praise Him in the accomplishment of His purposes.

Who, then, is this rider upon the white horse? Before this question is answered, the reader must be reminded that, in accordance with the interpretation given on chapter iv., the events here symbolized are wholly future. There are those who, missing the truth of the church and the church's hope, regard this scripture as already fulfilled; and, having ransacked the records of the past, they will point to certain events which, in their judgment, correspond with these symbols. This is to turn prophecy into history, besides ignoring, as already noticed, the threefold division of this book made by the Lord Himself. (Chap. i. 19.) It is quite true that there are often foreshadowings of the fulfilment of a prophecy, even as the first Napoleon, flitting across the stage of the world, was by his energy and rapidity of conquest, an undoubted shadow of the final head of the Roman Empire, if not indeed the seventh head, of whom the angel said, "When he cometh, he must continue a short space." (Chap. xvii. 10.) But it is a mistake to suppose that, because striking agreements with the thing predicted can be detected, you have found its complete fulfilment. We need, therefore, to be on our guard; and then, when we understand the structure of

the book, and that all after chapter iii. relates to the future, we shall be kept from vain surmisings, and be able reverently to pursue our enquiry.

Returning then to our question, we must, in order to seek the answer, attend to the details here given. The prominent object is the white horse.* A horse is often used in Scripture as a symbol of God's power in His providential government (see Zechariah i. 8–11); and the white horse, from the analogy of chapter xix., would seem to be connected with the exercise of victorious judgments, all-conquering might in conquest. The rider has a bow, setting forth his warrior character; and a crown was given unto him.† The import of this statement will be, that this mighty conqueror, used as others have been in past ages for the execution of God's judgments upon earth, is not a monarch when he first appears, but one who obtains a crown by his energy, his strategy, or his victories. The powers that be are ordained of God, and hence, though this successful warrior may even seize his crown, it is yet given to him.‡ Lastly, he goes forth conquering and to conquer; no one, and nothing, can withstand his seemingly irresistible power, as he marches on through victory to victory.

Such is the divine portrayal of a mighty conqueror

* To maintain, as some have done, that because the Lord Himself comes out of heaven on a white horse (chap. xix. 11), it is also Christ on the white horse here, is to overlook the plainest teachings of this vision.

† We append the following note from the *New Translation*: "Or 'had been given to him'; that is, it is not expressive of a particular time. He had one which was given to him. But it is the same tense as 'went forth.'"

‡ This is saying too much; for while "the powers that be" are ordained of God up to the rapture of the saints, it would seem that God does not recognise any power as derived from Himself in the interval between the rapture and the appearing of Christ. The crown therefore will be given by man.

who will arise hereafter, as the blind instrument, like Nebuchadnezzar, of God's vengeance upon the nations of the earth. Who he will be it is impossible, spite of the pretensions of men, to forecast; but from indications given in this book, it may be that the picture finds its counterpart in the first "beast" of Rev. xiii.; that is, the imperial head of the western empire. (*vv.* 1–8; see also chap. xvii. 10–12.)

The next three seals may be referred to in fewer words. There are two points in them common to the first: the event on earth follows upon the opening of the seal in heaven, and it is one of the living creatures in each case that calls attention to the effect of opening the seal. This latter point aids in the understanding of the character of the event; for, if the living creatures are emblems of the attributes of God as displayed in creation, and are seen in heaven as connected with the throne, a "throne of executory judgment," it is evident that we are here upon the ground "of the providential course of God's dealings"—dealings in judgment, it must be remembered, by which He is about to make good His character in government on the earth. But, as has been written, "they have God's voice in them, the voice of the Almighty; which the ear of him who has the Spirit hears. These (the consequences on earth of opening the seals in heaven) complete the providential plagues as spoken of in Scripture. Then direct judgments follow. These (the providential plagues) are what we may call preparatory measures."* The principles thus laid down will enable us to grasp more intelligently the following parts of the vision.

On the opening of the second, third, and fourth seals other horses appear, red, black, and pale—all emblematical

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, p. 504.

of their mission. In each of these cases, as it would seem, the rider is less prominent than in the case of the first, being, as it were, bound up with the horse so as to present a single idea. Thus the second horse is red, a colour connected with blood-shedding; and in agreement with this, it is given to the rider to take away peace from the earth; and the period would be characterized by internecine warfare, men should kill one another; and of all this the great sword given to the rider is but a symbol. Nor must it be overlooked, that this second horse may be intimately associated with the first; so also the third and fourth with their predecessors. It is what will mark the time of which John writes, and of which the Lord Himself had forewarned His disciples. (See Matt. xxiv. 6, 7.)

Famine is set forth by the black horse, an almost invariable result, as history testifies, of prolonged wars and conflicts. The quantity of wheat and barley needful for the barest sustenance* would be sold for a penny; that is, a denarius. But in the midst of widespread desolation and want, God thinks of the needs of His creatures, and limits the effects of the famine by sparing the oil and the wine.

Pestilence as plainly characterizes the fourth horse; for his colour is pale, and his name that sat on him was Death; and Hades, the abode of the dead, followed, as if, in the striking meaning of the figure, to gather up, as its prey, those whom death or the pestilence might destroy. There was, moreover, "*power given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*" (*v.* 8.) War, famine, pestilence, and the plague of wild

* It has sometimes been noticed that a measure of wheat was the daily allowance for a Roman soldier.

beasts are now crowded together (as they have often been) as attendant upon, or the results of, these judicial scourges. These are what Ezekiel calls God's four sore plagues (chap. xiv. 21; compare also chapters v. and vi.); and these are the weapons with which He will one day deal with the earth on account of her iniquity. We have said "the earth"; it is really the fourth part of the earth. The "third part" is a prophetic expression for the Roman Empire; and accordingly we gather that these fearful judgments will be limited in their area, that the whole of the Roman earth will not be visited. They will constitute, as preparatory inflictions, solemn warnings, God's call to those who can recognise His hand to humiliation and repentance. (Compare chap. xi. 13.)

With the opening of the fifth seal an insight is vouchsafed into the condition of the remnant testimony during the procession of the events associated with the previous seals: "*And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.*" (*v.* 9.) There will thus be persecution, and that of the severest kind. As the Lord Himself, speaking of this same period, forewarned His disciples, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." (Matt. xxiv. 9; compare Rev. xii. 17.) The Holy Ghost will have departed with the church; the will of man and the power of evil will be unbridled; it will be man's hour and the power of darkness, and the consequence will be relentless animosity against all who maintain the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. These witnesses for God will undoubtedly be Jews, quickened Jews, who will come into the place of testimony after the saints have been caught

up into the air to be for ever with the Lord, and who will form the persecuted remnant so often met with in the Book of Psalms. That they are not Christians is shown from their cry for vengeance, as well as indeed from the name in which they address God. They do not possess the Spirit of adoption; they cry, "O Sovereign Ruler,* holy and true," &c. (*v.* 10.)

But their cry is heard; for "*white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*" (*v.* 11.) The following words explain this scene: "Their being under the altar means simply that they had offered their bodies, as sacrifices for the truth, to God. The white robes are the witnesses of their righteousness — God's declared approval of them. . . . I do not think giving white robes is resurrection." Indeed, the fact that others were yet to be martyred proves that it is not; for we afterwards read, "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Chap. xx. 4.) Here we have the complete company of God's faithful witnesses, who, during the interval between the coming of Christ for the church and His appearing, did not count their lives dear unto them, but sealed their testimony with their blood, and who are now seen to have the blessed recompense of enjoying part in the first resurrection. The witnesses of our chapter belong to this company, and meanwhile white robes are bestowed upon

* Such is the rendering given in the *New Translation.*

them in token of God's approval and recognition of their fidelity.

The Lamb now opens the sixth seal: "*And, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together: and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*" (*vv.* 12–14.) That this, in accordance with the nature of the book, is symbolical language is evident (see chapters xi. xii.; Daniel viii. 9, 10, &c.); and hence the meaning is that, consequent upon opening the sixth seal, there will be "a violent convulsion of the whole structure of society," whereby all order and every form of government, supreme, derivative, or subordinate (sun, moon, stars), will be overturned and, for the time, destroyed.*

The effect of this awful commotion is next described. Every class of society, from the kings of the earth down to the poor slaves, are filled with abject terror. They had been making themselves happy without God; but while, like Belshazzar, they were feasting themselves to their hearts' content with their wicked enjoyments, the whole framework of man's order, on which they had been reposing in fancied security, is smitten, and shattered into ten thousand pieces. God does not *appear* in the judgment; but man has a conscience, and thus it is, in the presence of this dire visitation, that all alike are apprehensive of the

* The world has witnessed many such moral earthquakes, among the most notable of which was the French Revolution of 1789, that which France recently celebrated. It was probably the most violent outburst against God that has ever been seen since the cross; and yet such is the spirit of the age, that Christians could be found in numbers to assist at its centennial commemoration!

wrath of God and of the Lamb. Ah! *where now is man's courage?* His warriors even tremble in the felt presence of a God whose very existence they had hitherto denied, and with one accord they seek to hide themselves, as they cry to the mountains and rocks, "*Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand?*" (*vv.* 16, 17.) That day had not yet come; but in the terror of the moment, inspired by the awful events through which they are passing, they anticipate it, and their consciences rightly tell them that they will not be able to stand before the God whose fear they had utterly cast off, and before the Lamb, whom they had scorned and rejected, when once He rises up to execute His judgments in the earth.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT the great day of the Lord's wrath, though anticipated in chapter vi., had not yet come is plainly seen in this chapter. Before that could arrive, God's elect of Israel had to be marked out for preservation, and an innumerable multitude of Gentiles exhibited as about to be brought through the great tribulation. This chapter therefore constitutes a kind of parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals. The first six seals were opened in immediate succession; but now there is a pause, and our attention is directed to an action from heaven in relation to Israel, and to those about to be redeemed from among the nations, before the last seal is broken. We read, "*And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*" (*vv.* 1–3.)

Angels, as ever, are the ministers of God's providential government. Here they are seen in the character of the executors of His judgments. (Compare Matt. xiii. 41, 42, 49, 50; Isaiah xxxvii. 36, &c.) They are presented here indeed as the restrainers of the powers of evil, as well as

the executors through these, in God's own time, of His vengeance. They stand upon the four corners of the earth, the whole earth (the number four being the symbol of earthly completeness) being under their delegated control. Remark also that they hold ("hold fast") the four winds of the earth, &c. The four winds are symbols, as one has written, "of those disturbing elements, existing in all quarters, which God can at His will let loose in judgment." Daniel thus said, "I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea." (Chap. vii. 2.) The sea in this scripture, as in our chapter, represents the nations in a state of tumult or commotion (compare chapter xiii. 1), while the earth sets forth rather the nations in the enjoyment of ordered government. Trees are often used in Scripture as figures of the great ones of the earth. (See Daniel iv. 19–22; Ezekiel xvii., xxxi., &c.)

We learn then that no judicial scourge or chastisement can fall upon the nations in the enjoyment of ordered government, upon the seething mass of the peoples when characterized by insurrection or revolutionary violence, or upon the kings or princes of the earth, until permitted of God; nay, until He sends it, even as He formerly sent the surrounding nations to punish His people Israel for their sins and transgressions.

We learn, secondly, that God's government of the world is in view of His people. The command given to the four angels by the angel ascending from the east was, that they were not to hurt the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, "till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." In like manner, when judgment was about to fall upon Jerusalem, the Lord caused a mark to be set upon the foreheads of the men that sighed, and that cried for all

the abominations that were done in the midst thereof (Ezek. ix.), and this faithful remnant was preserved in the midst of the overflowing scourge.

The angel that ascended from the east had the seal of the living God.* The difference between this sealing and that of believers now with the Holy Ghost will be at once perceived by the instructed reader. Believers of this dispensation are sealed immediately on the forgiveness of sins, and they are sealed unto the day of redemption. (Ephes. iv. 30.) The 144,000 of this chapter are sealed with the seal of the living God for preservation through the judgments that will fall upon the world, and which will constitute for Israel the day of Jacob's trouble (Jer. xxx. 4–9; see also Matt. xxiv. 21, 22); and they are sealed for blessing on the earth in the kingdom of their glorious Messiah.

This 144,000 are composed of 12,000 from each tribe.† The number is symbolical. Twelve is the number of administrative perfection of government in man; and it thus appears in the foundations, gates, and dimensions of the new Jerusalem. (Chap. xxi.) It will mean, therefore, a perfect number reserved for the kingdom, and through whom Messiah will govern the nations upon the earth. They will not all be gathered in, though all are foreknown, at the same time; for only two tribes will be in the land when Messiah appears in His glory; and it will not be until after He has established His throne, that He

* It has been thought by many that this angel is no less a personage than our blessed Lord. It is undoubted that He does appear in this book (as we may be permitted to see) under the guise of an angel; but here we prefer leaving the question undecided.

† It will be noticed that Dan is omitted, whereas in Deut. xxxiii. Simeon is omitted. The reasons for these omissions are not known, but many conjectures are offered.

will fetch the ten tribes out of their hiding-places, and, after He has purged out the rebels in the wilderness, bring them back to the land. (Ezekiel xx. 33–44; Jer. xxx.) But every one who has the seal of the living God on his forehead will be preserved, and will, at the appointed time, be restored to blessing in Immanuel's land.

Following upon this, we are introduced to another class who will be brought in safety through the unparalleled troubles which are yet to occur. "*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*" (*vv.* 9, 10.) It should be remembered that this vast multitude is seen in vision, and that, therefore, at the time of the vision they were not yet existent, much less delivered; but before the great tribulation (*v.* 14), God permits His servant to see the issue of His ways of grace in the midst of His governmental judgments. This innumerable throng of Gentiles (for they are composed of "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues") are the elect of God's purpose for earthly blessing outside of the elect of Israel, those, therefore, who will be preserved through the hour of temptation (not kept out of it, as the church will be (chapter iii. 10), but saved through it) which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. It may be added that they are nowhere else spoken of in Scripture; it is, in fact, a new revelation, and one that shows the victorious energy of God's grace in the face of the most complete display of Satan's power that the world will have ever witnessed.

Their position is before the throne, and before the

Lamb. The heavenly saints, as typified by the four and twenty elders, are seated on thrones *round about* the throne; these stand *before* the throne, and before the Lamb. The difference, with its import, will at once be perceived; and, in fact, as will be afterwards seen, this multitude, while occupying a very special place of blessing, are still on earth. They are clothed with white robes, fruit of the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb* (*v.* 14); and they have palms in their hands—the emblem of their victorious deliverance. But if victors, they have overcome, as another class in chapter xii., "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." The ascription of praise which they render is also very different from that of the heavenly saints in chapter v. These cry (they do not sing), "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Redemption is not the ground of their praise; it is rather their deliverance (salvation—salvation through their unequalled sorrows) which they celebrate, although they ascribe all to God, God in His government, and to the Lamb "as having the title to the government and deliverance of the earth as a present thing."

The angels† enter now upon the scene, and worship God prostrate on their faces before the throne, "*Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*" (*v.* 12.) They are interested spectators of

* It may be rather that, while the blood of the Lamb is the fundamental and efficacious cause of all their blessing, the white robes may indicate moral suitability to their position. They had maintained practical holiness.

† "The four living creatures and the elders do not worship here, because their own relationships were different, and these are not what are spoken of here."

the homage which the white-robed multitude render to God and the Lamb, but, "naturally, salvation to the Lamb was not their own part of the song," for they had ever stood in their own creature-perfection; and hence they, having added their "Amen" to the praise of the multitude, worship their God, ascribing to Him their sevenfold theme of praise (compare chapter v. 12), and sealing it with another "Amen."

Having been permitted to see, through John, the victorious and worshipping Gentile throng, their character and blessing are now unfolded. "*And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of* [*the*] *great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" (*vv.* 13, 14.) Remark, first, how every family in heaven is interested in the activities of God and the Lamb both in grace and government, and also how closely the glorified in heaven is bound up with the redeemed on earth. It is only in our minds that heaven and earth are so widely sundered. The angels, as we have seen, delight in beholding this Gentile throng; and now one of the elders steps forth (otherwise we would not have known that they were in the scene), and, as commissioned, explains to John who this multitude are. First, then, they have come out of *the* great tribulation. It is not only, as in our translation, great, but emphatically *the* great tribulation, the time referred to, as already indicated, in chapter iii. 10. It is not the same thing as "Jacob's trouble," though undoubtedly connected with, if not springing out of it; and it will occur during the three years and a half of antichrist's fearful sway, sustained as he will be by the

head of the western empire, the first beast of Revelation xiii. It is to this same period our blessed Lord refers when He says, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matt. xxiv. 21.) He speaks of the Jewish trouble, while "the great tribulation" has reference to the oppression and persecution through which the Gentiles will have to pass. In the contemplation of this fearful event, it is no small consolation to find that God will use the unexampled sorrows of that day, if on the one hand for the chastisement of the haughty peoples of the earth, on the other hand for the blessing of this vast throng of souls. They will come out of this terrible tribulation, and, moreover, they will have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is most interesting to note that in all dispensations every family of the saved will alike have to trace all their blessing back to the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb.*

The character of their blessing is next given: "*Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*" (*v.* 15.) We have before given the explanation of their position "before the throne of God," and the very next sentence confirms the interpretation that they occupy this blessed position on earth; for we are expressly told that there is no temple in heaven. (Chap. xxi. 22.) "They are not only as Israel in the courts, or the nations in the world; they have a priest's

* It may again be remarked that in Scripture we are never said to wash our own robes in the blood of Christ; but garments were always washed, as in the case of the leper, in water. The meaning may therefore be, that being under the virtue of the blood of the Lamb, this multitude had preserved themselves from the contaminations around through the word of God.

place in the world's temple. The millennial multitudes are worshippers—these priests. As Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, ever in the temple itself (where they, like her, serve day and night) they have always access to the throne." Besides this, God will, as with Israel of old in the wilderness, spread His tabernacle over them, the source of all their blessing.

His presence thus enjoyed, as well as His guardian care, "*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* (*vv.* 16, 17.) Now, under the shepherd * care of the Lamb, and enjoying His immediate protection, guidance, and ministry, they are blessed for ever; for they should never more know hunger or thirst, but should be abundantly satisfied; nor should persecution or sorrow ever more reach them; for the Lamb Himself shall lead them to "fountains of waters of life," and God shall wipe away "every tear" from their eyes. There will surely be not one of all this multitude who will not, with overflowing heart, confess that their past sorrows are not worthy to be compared with the ineffable blessings on which they have now entered. For though they are on earth, the reader will not fail to remark that their blessings are described, at least in their highest character, in the same way as those enjoyed in the eternal state. Of this multitude, equally with those of the new earth, it is said that God wipes away their tears.†

* The word "feed" is better rendered "shepherd."

† The question of the bodily condition of this multitude, whether in a changed state or not, is left unrevealed. Certainly their blessings are of a very high order and permanent.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO follow with intelligence the course of events connected with the trumpets, it will be necessary to recall what has already been considered. After the Lamb had taken the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne, and had received the homage and adoration of both heaven and earth, as the One who alone was worthy to make good the character of God in government, in virtue of His redemptive work, He proceeded to open the seals. Six of the seven seals are opened in chapter vi., and the various events connected with them follow in succession. Before the seventh is broken, the 144,000 of the elect of Israel are sealed—sealed for safety and preservation—in view of the approaching judgments which will precede and usher in the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. (See chap. xi. 13.) There is, moreover, the presentation of the great multitude of Gentiles, who will be brought, according to the purpose of God, through the great tribulation which is about to come upon the whole habitable world. Before therefore God lifts up His rod to smite His ancient people, and also the nations of the earth, He permits us to see that in the midst of wrath He remembers mercy; that while Israel will be sifted among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth (Amos ix. 9); and that the terrible scourge which will be wielded in judgment over the nations will not be suffered to destroy

one of that countless number whom He has named and reserved for blessing. Though therefore His path is in the sea, and He rides upon the wings of the wind, He cheers our heart by unveiling to us the issue of His dealings in judgment in pure and perfect blessing.

Another thing must be observed. There is evidently a break between the first six seals and the seventh with its developments. The first six bring in preliminary judgments, constitute perhaps "the beginning of sorrows," whereas the last introduces that period of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (See Matthew xxiv. 8, 21, 22.) Bearing this distinction in mind, it will be the easier to follow the subsequent events.

We have then, first of all, the opening of the seventh seal: "*And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.*" (*vv.* 1, 2.) Immediately upon the opening of the seventh seal there follows, not, as in the previous cases, the attendant judgment, but silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. Surely this expresses the solemnity of the crisis which has now arrived. It is, as it were, a divine pause before the infliction of the last and most awful judgments upon the habitable world. The seven angels which stood before God then appear, and to them are given seven trumpets. It will be remarked that the trumpets are developed out of the seventh seal.

Before, however, the angels sound their trumpets, there is the introduction of a brief but most significant scene. "*And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much*

incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*" (*vv.* 3–5.) This scene is clearly in heaven, as marked by the golden altar and the throne. The angel therefore can be no less a personage than the great High Priest, the Mediator between God and His people. The prayers of all saints—saints on earth, it need scarcely be said—are seen ascending up to God upon the golden altar; but it is the action of the "Angel" in adding the incense that gives the efficacy to their prayers, for the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. This is a blessed familiar truth to every believer, and one embodied continually in our hymns of praise. For example—

> "Boldly the heart and voice we raise,
> His blood, His name, our plea;
> Assured our prayers and songs of praise
> Ascend, by Christ, to Thee."

Yes, we all know that it is Christ—Christ in all the value of what He is to God, as having glorified Him on the cross, that gives efficacy to the prayers of His people; and it is this truth that is embodied in this symbolic scene.

But there is more. It is as an answer to the prayers of the saints that the angel took the censer, and filled it

* Literally, the word is "give"; that is, as to its meaning, that He should give efficacy to their prayers.

with the fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth. That is, God is pleased to associate His saints with Himself even in His ways of judgment; and thus the judgments, set forth by the fire of the altar, are seen going forth in response to the cries of His people. This plainly indicates who the saints are. They are the earthly saints after the rapture of the Church, the remnant so often appearing in the Psalms, and pleading for vengeance upon their adversaries. (See also Luke xviii. 7, 8.) The voices, thunderings, &c., are but varied symbols of the different forms of divine power in judgment with which this poor world is about to be visited.

The seven angels in the next place "*prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*" (*vv.* 6, 7.)* The form of these judgments is reminiscent of those that fell upon Egypt. (See Exodus ix. 22–26.) The language, of course, is symbolical. "Hail" is often found in Scripture as the expression of violent and destructive judgment (see Joshua x. 11; Isaiah xxviii., xxx.; Ezekiel xxxviii. 22); "fire" is significant of the holiness of God as applied in dealing judicially with men, with the thought of an all-penetrating and consuming character; while "blood" will be indicative of death, but death under the judgment of God. The expression, "The third part of the earth," &c., points to the area of the judgments. From chapter xii. 4 there can be little doubt that "the third part" refers to the extent of the Roman empire. If this be so,

* In the best manuscripts, before the statement that "the third part of trees was burnt up," there is found this clause, "And the third part of the earth was burnt up."

the prophetic Roman earth will be the scene of the terrible judgments here following upon the sounding of the first trumpet. The objects of the devastating judgment will be "trees" and "green grass." If we connect this with chapter vii. 1, it will be seen that the judgment is one of those restrained by the angels there, until the servants of God should have been sealed in their foreheads. The "trees" here, therefore, will, as there, mean the great ones of the earth; while the "green grass" being burnt up would signify, as it appears to us, the destruction of all general prosperity. God at length has stepped in, and dealt with "the man of the earth" in his pomp and pride, and dried up at the same time the sources of his wealth and greatness; but it is only as introductory to even severer judgments.

The next, as connected with the sounding of the second trumpet, is described as "*a great mountain burning with fire*," which was "*cast into the sea*." A mountain in Scripture is figurative of established power, and hence sometimes of the seat of government. This symbol will accordingly mean that some such power, kindling with fire as God's judgment, is cast into the midst of the seething masses of the people, as represented by the sea. The consequence is that "*the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed*." (*vv.* 8, 9.) The extent of these judgments is the same as that of those which precede, as shown by the term "the third part"; and first, all through the peoples (the sea) of the Roman earth, the "blood," the "deathful power of evil" prevails; a third part of the creatures in the sea that had life died; *i.e.*, as another has written, "I suppose dying here to be de-

parture from the profession of association with God, public separation from Him, or apostasy." Infidelity and atheism indeed always flourish in times of great disturbances, social earthquakes, and revolutions. The destruction of the third part of ships points plainly to the ruin of commercial means of prosperity.

Upon the sounding of the third trumpet "*there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: ... and many died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*" (*v.* 11.) A star is the symbol of authority in government, not supreme (for this is represented by the sun), but subordinate, and one therefore, from the very emblem employed, who should have been the source of light and order to men. But he falls "from heaven," from the place in which he *had been* set by God (for the powers that be are ordained of God); that is, he is now by his fall dissevered from all connection with God, though he still burns, not as a star, but as a lamp, and thus attracts by his light and radiance. He falls upon and corrupts all the sources, the moral sources, of life, as set forth by the rivers and fountains of waters. Accordingly his name indicates the effects of his action, for a third part of the waters (the sphere and range of his influence) become wormwood, bitter and poisonful to those who drink of them, and consequently many die. (Compare Deuteronomy xxix. 18; Proverbs v. 4.) An illustration of such an effect may often be seen when one who has been prominent in the church of God becomes unfaithful or apostate, and morally destroys his hearers by infidel teachings. In manifold ways it is possible for those who have fallen from high places, whether amongst men or in the church, to poison

the sources of life, and it is just this that will take place on a grand scale, alas! at the fall of the star Wormwood.

It is the governments of the earth that are affected by the sound of the fourth trumpet (*v.* 12), and no form of it escapes; for, as before pointed out, the sun is a symbol of supreme authority, the moon of that which is derived from the supreme, even as the moon derives her light from the sun and reflects it, while the stars as plainly speak of that which is subordinate. Sun, moon, and stars, therefore, are an expression of every order of human authority in government. Again, the "third part" appears in these judgments; that is, they are as yet confined to the Roman earth, to its western empire; and the effect is, that confusion and darkness reign instead of peace and security. Little do men apprehend how much they are indebted to orderly and stable governments. It is only in insurrectionary or revolutionary periods, when thrones are overturned and lawless passions reign supreme, that they learn the value of the priceless blessings, which, in a human sense, are connected with the maintenance of sovereign and righteous rule. Hence the striking language here employed to designate the dire consequences of the overturning in judgment of "the powers that be." "The day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise"; that is, as another has said, "Not only the public course of things was cast into confusion and darkness—the day in sunlight darkened, but the more private and hidden life of man lost the light that guided it."

A division occurs between the first four trumpets and the last three, and this is marked by the last verse of this chapter. "*And I beheld, and heard an angel* flying*

* There can scarcely be a doubt that "eagle" should be here substituted for "angel."

through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound." (*v.* 13.) As this solemn proclamation (if it be not denunciation) forms the introduction to the last three trumpets, comment upon it may be reserved for the next chapter. The judgments following upon the first four trumpets have covered the whole of symbolic creation. The earth, trees, grass, the sea, rivers, fountains of waters, and the celestial bodies, all have been smitten—proof of the unparalleled character of the sorrows and trials which will compose what is termed "the great tribulation," "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Chapter iii. 10.) But when God arises to judgment, if men repent not, He will vindicate His name and authority with ever-increasing severity; and hence we find that, terrible as the first four trumpets have been, they are surpassed in their judicial terror by the three "woe" trumpets yet to be sounded.

CHAPTER IX.

THE last verse of the preceding chapter, as before stated, belongs, and is introductory, to this chapter. Four of the seven trumpets have already been sounded: and now John is permitted to see in vision the herald of the remaining three which are yet to sound.* He beheld an eagle—for this is the true reading—flying through the midst of heaven, proclaiming a threefold woe upon the inhabiters of the earth, by reason of the coming voices of the trumpets.

The "inhabiters of the earth" is a moral expression, as in chapter iii. 10,† indicating a class; those whose hearts and hopes are set upon earth, those who, in the language of the apostle Paul, mind earthly things. The judgments following upon the preceding trumpets, if the interpretation given of "the third part of the earth" be correct, are confined to the west, whereas these, at least the fifth and sixth, fall upon the east; and this fact sustains the moral significance of the term, dwellers upon earth. It will, moreover, be seen at a glance, that the judgments of the "woe" trumpets are of a very different character from those already passed under review. This will be more clearly apprehended as we proceed.

* It is a characteristic of the sevens in this book, that they are divided into fours and threes, or threes and fours. Compare the division of the parables in Matthew xiii.

† The words are the same, though differently translated.

We read then, first of all, that "*the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.*" (*v.* 1.) The symbolism of a star has been explained in connection with chapter viii. 10; it means generally some subordinate authority or power, one that should be the means of light and order for the earth. It is evident in this case that he becomes, if he had not been directly so before, a Satanic agent for the infliction, by God's permission, of torment upon the class delivered into his hands. The key of the bottomless pit ("the pit of the abyss") is given (by whom is not said) to him. We learn from the gospel of Luke, that this is the place which demons shunned to enter (chapter viii. 31), and this at once gives the clue to its character. If the four previous judgments were providential, though inflicted judicially by God, this, while still under God's control, is diabolical in its origin and nature. Thus, on the bottomless pit being opened, "*there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace: and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*" (*vv.* 2, 3.) What the smoke exactly represents it may be difficult to say, but its source and effect are manifest. It comes from the abyss, from hell, and it obscures the sun and the air, shuts man off from all that is needful for his moral and spiritual welfare. It is thus Satan's smoke to-day that darkens the word of God from the souls of men, who, breathing it instead of the pure influences of the Scriptures, become morally poisoned and tormented; and this enables us to understand the effect of the smoke here in darkening the sun and the air.

Remark, moreover, that the locusts come out of the smoke upon the earth; they originate with, or are produced by, the smoke. The prophet Joel gives us figuratively an insight into the terrible nature of the judgment God can inflict with the actual locusts. To-day there is no scourge more feared in the east and in some parts of Africa, and none before which man is more entirely impotent. Every green thing is often devoured, and so dense are the masses in which they move when they fly, that sun and sky (as with the smoke in this chapter) are entirely obscured. This will explain the use of the figure here, and allows us, at the same time, more readily to conceive the character of the visitation indicated by these moral locusts that have come out of the abyss.

Their power is limited; for we read, "*It was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.*" (*v.* 4.) Two things are determined by this command; first, that, as before stated, they are moral, and not real, locusts, because it is precisely the herbage and trees of the earth that the natural locusts ravage; and, secondly, that the object of this awful visitation is apostate Jews. We learn from chapter vii. that the servants of God, who were to be sealed in their foreheads, are the elect of the twelve tribes, and accordingly those not sealed would be Jews outside of this elect number. And from the subsequent unfoldings of this book, it is very evident that the location of these unsealed Jews will be, for the most part, if not entirely, in Jerusalem and Palestine. This fact, and it is of great significance, indicates both the sphere and the character of the judgment. It is,

in other words, Jewish in its sphere, and is confined to Jews.*

The next two verses (*vv.* 5, 6) give the nature, duration, and effect of this judgment. The "locusts" were not permitted to kill, only to torment, and this for the space of five months.† The effect of the torment is that the subjects of it become weary of their lives, desire to die, but death flees from them. Death would be a relief from their agony, but, suffering by God's appointment, covet it as they may, they are not permitted to find it. This torment is caused by the "locusts," for "their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man." Of the nature of this, whether mental or otherwise, we are not told; but if, as we conclude, these "locusts" are diabolical agents, the seat of the torment would be in the soul rather than in the body.

The shapes, appearance, armour, &c., of the locusts are now given. (*vv.* 7–10.) They were like warhorses prepared unto battle, kingly in their dignity, for "*on their heads*

* Through missing these points, those who have adopted what is termed the historical method of interpretation, contend that the plague here spoken of was realized in the invasion of Europe by the Saracens and Mahommedans; while others of the same school would combine Popery with the Saracenic visitation. That this moral plague had some correspondence with the language of our chapter few would deny; that it is its entire fulfilment, none who accept its application to apostate Jews in Palestine could for one moment admit. Besides, the locusts of our chapter had no power to kill, whereas slaughter, and that of immense numbers, was especially that which characterized the Mahommedan inroads and conquests.

† For those who favour the application of this prophecy to the Saracens, it is necessary to adopt the "year-day" theory in explaining the five months; *i.e.*, taking a day to represent a year, the five months are extended to the period of one hundred and fifty years; and this, it is affirmed, corresponds with the period of the Saracenic domination. Unfortunately for the upholders of this view, the year-day theory finds no support whatever in this book.

were as it were crowns like gold"; together with the faces of men, they had the hair of women, and the teeth of lions; they had breastplates as it were of iron, "*and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.*" The historical interpreters, to whom allusion has been made, love to see in all this description a faithful photograph of the Saracenic armies; and if the inroad of these hordes in the seventh and eighth centuries were even a *partial* fulfilment, which became a shadow of the entire realization, of this prophetic vision, there might be some foundation for this contention. But those who have a truer insight into the nature of the Apocalypse will rather see in this detailed description the moral features which will characterize the work and activities of this legion of Satan in their cruel and judicial mission. The following words will explain this to the reader: "They had the semblance of military, imperial power, crowned, and with masculine energy, to those that met them; but they were, if seen behind and the secret disclosed, subject and weak: their faces were as the faces of men, their hair as the hair of women. But they were armed with a steeled conscience."* Rapidity in execution would seem to be indicated by the sound of their wings.

Then, after calling attention to the fact that their sting was in their tails, and repeating that their commission to hurt men was limited to five months, John reveals that their king and leader is the angel of the bottomless pit (the abyss), and that his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, in Greek Apollyon. In both languages the meaning is nearly the same—the former being *Destruction*, the latter *Destroyer*. Satan's chief angel, *the* angel of the abyss, governs this destructive army; and the vengeance wielded

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. v., pp. 606-7.

falls on those who bear the name of the people of God (Jews), but who now, alas! have become apostates. It is under Satan's wiles and temptations that they have fallen from their high estate; and now he, whose servants they have become, is their vindictive enemy and tormentor. So is it always when by his diabolical ingenuity he succeeds in entrapping his prey, even though he be but a blind instrument to execute the just judgment of God.

The declaration is now made that the first woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter [after these things]. (*v.* 12.) Thereupon "*the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an*" (it should be *the*) "*hour, and a day, and a month, and a year,* for to slay the third part of men.*" (*vv.* 13–15.) The golden altar is that mentioned in chapter viii. 3, the altar of incense; and the voice that proceeds from its four horns is, without doubt, that of God Himself; and coming out, as it does, from the four horns will signify that all the strength of the altar (a horn is an emblem of power) is against the objects of the succeeding woe, and this probably, as in chapter viii., in answer to the prayers of saints. All that God is, is in favour of His people who approach Him through Christ; but all that God is, is against His adversaries, and is seen to be so when He causes His judgments to fall upon the earth.

The mention of the river Euphrates shows that this "woe" takes its rise from the east, and, inasmuch as the "third part" reappears here, falls upon the Roman empire in

* Rendering *the* hour instead of *an* hour, the indefinite article before day, month, and year should be omitted.

the east. The first four trumpets concerned the western empire; the fifth, apostate Jews in Palestine; and now the sixth deals with the eastern Roman empire, showing that there is order and method in the judgments. Four angels are the instrumentality of this woe. The reader will remember that angels are the administrators of God's providential government; and we thus gather that this "woe" will spring up apparently from human causes, that God's hand will not be made bare in it, though, as this scripture teaches, the source of all that leads to it is in heaven. Unbelief will discover nothing in it apart from man; but faith will connect all with God.

Observe, moreover, that the exact time of this "woe" has been divinely fixed. The angels are prepared for *the* hour, day, month, and year. What a striking proof of the fact that God ever holds the reins of governments in His own hand, and that nothing can be done by man without His permission! How quietly then the believer may rest at all times!

The angels are loosed, and an army appears. The angels are God's providential agents. The army is expressive of man's power—man acting, it may be, solely from the lust of conquest, and yet, at the same time, the executor of God's judicial will. It is an immense host—200,000,000; and the weapons of their warfare are fire, smoke, and brimstone, emblems of God's direct judgment, which issue out of their horses' mouths — while their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads—pourtraying Satanic vengeance. The heads of the horses, moreover, were as the heads of lions. The whole imagery sets forth God's judgment, executed, however, through Satan's craft and power, portending an unparalleled woe. The effect is, that "the third part of men" are "killed by the fire, and by

the smoke, and by the brimstone." (v. 18.) And it would seem, from the general statement in verse 19, that with their tails "they do hurt," that others, if not killed, fall under the direct influence of this terrible judgment.

What then does this vision of judgment shadow forth? The interpreters of the historical school answer at once, "The irruption of the Turks into the eastern Roman empire in the fifteenth century." It is quite true that this event happened, and that, coming from near the Euphrates as the Turks did, it might have been, as in the case of the Saracens, a shadow of the fulfilment of this prophecy. With the view taken of this book in these pages, with its divinely-given threefold division, the Turkish subjugation of the Roman eastern empire could be nothing more than an adumbration of this "woe": for its real fulfilment can only take place after the rapture of the church. Premising this, it is quite possible that hordes from the East might in the future, as in the past, be the instruments of this divine vengeance—vengeance poured out upon a godless and a God-denying atheistical empire. The saints of that day will then discover whence the chastisement proceeds, and understand its real object and character as depicted in the written Word.

The chapter concludes with an account of the hardened condition of those who "were not killed by these plagues." They "*repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts.*" (*vv.* 20, 21.) What a commentary upon the hardened heart of man under the control of Satan! God's judgments had been before their eyes. They had seen their fellows swept away from the

earth by "these plagues"; but their conscience, seared as with a hot iron, was untouched. God had spoken, and warned; but they were utterly deaf to His solemn voice. Remark, too, the awful moral condition that will characterize the people of this day. God is refused, idols are accepted in His place; all ties between man and man are broken, and the flesh runs riot in every kind of abominable sin. And this is the issue of modern progress and civilization, of perfected methods of education, of enlightened laws for the improved government and reformation of society! For let it be remembered that this revived Roman empire, the sphere of this "woe," will be the expression of man's highest ideal, the issue in this world of all his strivings after the "perfectibility of the race." Behold then the result!

CHAPTER X.–XI.

SIX out of the seven trumpets have sounded; and now there is an interval before the announcement of the third woe which is heralded by the seventh and last trumpet. It follows that chapter x. to xi. 14 is parenthetical. There is a similar interval between the sixth and seventh seals, with, as often noticed, a slight difference. The events depicted between the sixth and seventh seals are preparatory to the latter, whereas those contained in the parenthesis between the last two trumpets are connected rather with, and supplementary to, the sixth trumpet. This may be seen from the fact that it is not until chapter xi. 14 that the proclamation is made: "The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly."

There are two subjects dealt with in the parenthetical scripture now under consideration; first, the action of the "mighty angel" in chapter x., and the state of the temple and of Jerusalem, together with the testimony of the two witnesses, as given in chapter xi. 1–14.

John says as to the former: "*And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.*" (*v.* 1.) Such is the personal description of this mighty angel, a description which, in several of its details, points us to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is clothed with a cloud. A

cloud is often connected with the divine presence, and hence with our Lord. This may be seen in the New Testament as well as constantly in the Old. On the mount of transfiguration a cloud overshadowed both Him and His disciples (Matt. xvii.; Luke ix.); and when He ascended up into heaven a cloud received Him out of the sight of His own. (Acts i.) When also He returns to the earth, He will come in the clouds of heaven. (Matt. xxiv. 30; Rev. 1. 7.) In chapter iv. the rainbow is round about the divine throne; here it is upon the angel's head, and the rainbow is the symbol of God's everlasting covenant with the earth. (Genesis ix. 12, 13.) None, therefore, but a Divine Person could wear the rainbow on His head. The last two characteristics, "His face was as it were the sun, and His feet as pillars of fire," are almost exactly the same as those given in chapter i. 15, 16. There cannot be a doubt, therefore, as to the identification of this mighty angel with Christ.

In His hand there was *a little book open.* It is not a sealed book as in chapter v., the contents of which could not be known until the seals were broken, but an open book, the contents of which were already known, referring, doubtless, to the fact that the action of Christ in taking possession of the earth and the sea (and all represented by the earth and the sea), as symbolized by His right foot on the sea, and His left foot on the earth, had already been made known through prophetic writings. (See, for example, Psalm lxxii.; Isaiah xi. xxv. lx.; Zechariah xiv., and numberless scriptures.)

Having set one foot on the sea, and the other upon the earth, He "*cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when He had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.*" (*v.* 3.) The subject of this cry is concealed; for when

John was about to write what the seven thunders had uttered, he was commanded to "seal up the things he had heard, and not to write them." (*vv.* 3, 4.) But from the imagery employed it is not difficult to discern that the cry of Christ, and the voices of the seven thunders, were expressive of His wrath, indignation, and righteous judgment; for, as we know from various scriptures, it is in anger, righteous anger, that He will come and deal with the man of the earth. (Compare Isaiah ii., xxvi. 20, 21, xlii. 13; Joel iii. 16, etc.)

The next three verses explain the significance of the action described in verse 2: "*And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up His hand to heaven, and sware by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:* but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.*" (*vv.* 5–7.)

Whether taken symbolically or literally, the action of the mighty angel (the Lord Himself) in setting one foot on the sea, and the other upon the earth, whether, that is, the actual sea and earth are meant, or whether they are figures of "the flowing masses of the people," and of the ordered governments of the earth, the significance is the same. It is Christ come down, after His long season of

* The word rendered time in this clause is χρόνος, which means "time," but also "a certain definite time, a while, period, season;" and hence, taken in its connection in this passage, should be translated as in the margin of the *Revised Version*, and as in the text of the *New Translation*, "delay." It should therefore read thus, "That there should be no longer delay."

patience at the right hand of God, to take possession of His rightful inheritance. (See Matt. xxviii. 18; 1 Cor. xv. 24–28; Heb. ii., etc.) It is to be observed also, that He takes possession, though He has acquired the title through His redemption work, in virtue of the sovereign rights of the Creator. Hence it is that, lifting up His hand to heaven, He swears by the eternal God, the universal Creator. It is creation's Lord who has bestowed the title, and now He comes to make it good, and accordingly declares that there shall be no longer delay, but that all the judgments, "the mystery of God," which concerns His dealing with the world between the first resurrection and the appearing of Christ in glory, should now be completed, in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, as preparatory to His coming in the clouds of heaven, when every eye shall see Him, to establish His sovereignty over the whole earth.

John is now commanded to take the little book that was open (or opened) in the hand of the angel that was standing upon the sea, and upon the earth. The contents of the opened book are to become the subject of John's testimony as to* peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. But if God sends His servant to prophesy, He wil first qualify him for his service; and thus John must first "eat" the book (compare Ezekiel iii. 1–3), he must appropriate and digest these divine communications before he can rightly communicate them to others. A lesson surely for God's servants in all ages. Notice, too, that while in the mouth the book should be sweet as honey, it should make John's belly bitter. So it ever is. How sweet is it to our taste when God communicates some

* The word translated "before" in verse 11 should be "as to." It is ἐπὶ followed by the dative.

new truth to us! We rejoice in it as those who have discovered hidden treasure; but all truth is death to the natural man, and accordingly when it is applied inwardly in the power of the Holy Ghost, we find it bitter in its working and effects. It is only after the truth has thus been made our own by inward application, that we can be taken up and used to testify of it to others. To attempt to "prophesy" before we have "eaten" and "digested" will only be to discover our nakedness in the presence of the enemy. This is the history of many who have made shipwreck as to the faith.

THE TWO WITNESSES.

Chapter xi. 1–14.

In the next place there was given to John "*a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.*" (*vv.* 1, 2.) Everything betokens here that we are now transferred to Jerusalem; for we read of the temple of God, the altar, the court, and the holy city. The mention too of the Gentiles, the nations in contrast with the Jews, points to the same conclusion, as well as the fact of their domination over the holy city. (Compare Luke xxi. 24.) The object of it is to show the state of that temple (where God's heart and eyes were perpetually to be) and of that city which He had chosen, on the eve of the final judgment, and of the Lord's return to it in glory. (See Matthew xxiii. 37–39.)

But John is commanded to measure with the reed given

to him the temple, the altar, and them that worship therein. The temple, inasmuch as the events of this chapter concern the period after the church is gone and before the Lord's appearing, must be that which will be built by the Jews, while in unbelief, after their return to their own land. We find, nevertheless, that there is a true remnant in the midst of the corrupt nation; and measuring the temple, the altar, and the worshippers will signify that they are owned of and, it may be, appropriated, or claimed by God. The word temple is that used of the house itself, including the holy place and the holiest; not the word sometimes employed, which indicates the whole of the sacred buildings, together with the court, etc. As a matter of fact, the worshippers had no access into the holy place; but we are taught here that God regarded them as belonging to it, even though they could not enter, and that thus the remnant are really invested before Him with a priestly character. How precious in the eyes of God are this believing residue, who, resisting all the seductions and temptations by which they are surrounded, and incurring thereby the hostility and persecution of the Gentile power which will be at this time supreme in Jerusalem, cleave in all fidelity to the God of their fathers, and, though in the deepest distress, wait only upon God for deliverance.

The court without the temple was to be left out—rejected; that is, the mass of the nation, whatever their profession (for they will have, in the last days, fallen again into idolatry), are refused. Another will have come in his own name, whom they will have received. (John v. 43.) They will have accepted Antichrist in the place of their own Messiah, who had been crucified by their fathers on Calvary. On this account the court—a figure of the

unbelieving nation, for it will be the place of their "worship"—is given unto the Gentiles; and they will also tread the holy city under foot forty and two months. Later on we shall see the signification of this period; but the reader will do well to remember it, as it forms the key to the concluding prophetic events of Scripture.

The following paragraph, from verse 3 to 13, concerns the remarkable apparition of the two witnesses. We must enquire, first of all, what is exactly indicated by the two witnesses. It must be remembered that we move in this book in the midst of symbols; and it might be, on this account, two companies of witnesses, if they are not two individuals. The point, however, to be seized lies, doubtless, in the number, two being ever the number of adequate testimony.* There will always be then, during this time of Satan's greatest display of power before the eyes of God's professing people (the Jews), an adequate testimony for God and His claims.

The next thing to be noted is the duration of their prophetic testimony. It will be a thousand two hundred and sixty days. In the previous verse we read of a period of forty-two months, during which the holy city will be trodden under foot of the Gentiles. The two periods coincide, both being exactly three years and a half.† It will suffice here to say, as the subject must be more fully gone into when chapter xiii. is reached, that this three years and a half are the last half of Daniel's seventieth

* This is strikingly seen in the Gospel of Matthew, where we have two demoniacs (chap. viii.), two blind men (chap. ix.), &c., because in this gospel it is a question of sufficient, or adequate, testimony to Israel.

† As before pointed out, and as may be easily proved from Scripture, there is no foundation whatever for the year-day theory; *i.e.*, for taking the 1260 days to mean so many years.

week (Daniel ix. 25–27), the period of Antichrist's frightful sway in Jerusalem with the support and shelter of all the power of the last head of the Roman empire; the period, at the close of which Christ will come in glory, and consume that wicked one with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thess. ii. 8.) Throughout this period of unequalled sorrow the two witnesses will courageously raise their voices, and be clothed in sackcloth, expressive of the sorrowful nature of their work owing to the character of the times in which they are found. Apart from all around, mourning over the fearful apostasy of the beloved nation, and rejected by all, sackcloth is but a fitting emblem of their testimony.

We are now told what they are: "*These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God* of the earth.*" (*v.* 4.) The connection between this description and that given in Zechariah iv. is apparent, and will afford the clue to the interpretation. As another has said, "They bear witness to the order and blessing of the Jewish state when Messiah shall reign; but they are not in that state. Not a candlestick with two olive trees (as in Zechariah), but two candlesticks and two olive trees. But they are before the God of the earth."† They are anointed ones, for they are olive trees, and they thus testify in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are the two candlesticks, &c.; their testimony therefore is the light from God amid the darkness of that day. And standing before the Lord of the earth shows that the subject of their testimony is the claims of the coming Messiah as the rightful Lord of the earth. (Compare

* The more generally accepted reading is "Lord."

† *Collected Writings of J. N. D.*, vol. ii., Expository, p. 554.

Joshua iii. 11.) Moreover, they are two *anointed* ones; and this also points, in addition to the power of their testimony, to the fact that it is as King and Priest—a Priest upon His throne, Melchisedec—that Christ will come and take possession.*

What follows is easily apprehended. If anyone hurts them, fire will proceed out of their mouth and devour him. (Compare 2 Kings i.) As Elijah of old, they will have power to shut up heaven that it shall not rain. Like Moses, they will have power to turn the waters into blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will. (*vv.* 5, 6.) After their testimony is finished, not before, the beast that ascendeth out of the abyss—the last head of the Roman empire—will be permitted to kill them. (*v.* 7.) Then their dead bodies will lie in the street of Jerusalem (now, alas! spiritually Sodom and Egypt) "*where also our Lord was crucified*," and where they will be a spectacle to peoples, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations, for three days and a half. They also that dwell upon the earth (the reader will remember the moral force of this expression) will, in their folly and imaginary triumph, make every demonstration of joy over the death of those who had tormented them. (*vv.* 7–10.)

God now steps into the scene, and raises His dead witnesses. "*And they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud: and their enemies beheld them.*" (*vv.* 11, 12.) What a revolution! And how short-lived the triumph of these foolish worldlings! Nor is this all; for judgment descends "the

* If any desire to enter more fully into this subject they may read "*Zechariah the Prophet*," chapter iv.

same hour" upon that poor guilty city, and "*the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand.*" (*v.* 13.) The remnant are affrighted, and give glory, not to the Lord of the earth, but to the God of heaven. They still refuse the testimony of the witnesses. The proclamation is now made, "*The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.*" (*v.* 14.)

THE THIRD WOE.

Chap. xi. 15–19.

We find the significance of the seventh trumpet in chapter x., where we read, "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets." Accordingly here, immediately on the sounding of the seventh angel, "*there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ;* and He shall reign for ever and ever.*" (*v.* 15.) That is to say, the end is now in a general way reached, and the announcement is made in heaven, that Christ has at length interposed, and assumed His sovereignty over the earth. There are many details and fuller instruction yet to be given, but the time of which prophets had prophesied, and saints of past ages had longed for and anticipated, has now come. The very appellations used—our Lord and His Christ—mark the period indicated. It is that of the second Psalm, wherein, in face of the rage of the heathen, and the vain imagination of the people,

* This has been more accurately rendered, "The kingdom of the world of our Lord and His Christ is come." The Revised Version gives it, "The kingdom of the world is become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ."

when "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed [His Christ], saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," the Lord, "laughing" at their vain impotence, will "speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." He will, at the same, announce, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

Such is the event proclaimed in heaven on the sounding of the seventh angel; for Zion will be the seat of the government of the Lord's Christ; from thence Jehovah will send out the rod of His strength, and, ruling in the midst of His enemies, He will reign for ever and ever, until He hath put all foes under His feet. (See Psalm cx.; Luke ii. 30–33, etc.)

But why, the question may be asked, should the setting up of the kingdom of Christ in this world be termed a "woe"? The class for whom it will be a "woe" is specified in chapter viii. 13; it is for "the inhabiters of the earth," not exactly, as has been more than once explained, for the *inhabitants* of the earth, but for those whose desires and affections are bounded by this world, those who make their home in it, who are therefore morally dwellers upon earth, and who, as such, are enemies of God and His Christ. Truly speaking, every unconverted soul belongs to this class now, and so will it be when the Lord returns to earth and takes His kingdom—all the unconverted will form the inhabiters of the earth. And for them the reign of Christ will bring unmitigated woe, for a sceptre of righteousness will be the sceptre of His kingdom; and thus it is that His arrows will be sharp in the heart of the King's enemies, and the peoples will fall under Him. Can anything be sadder than the thought,

that the event which will inaugurate an era of peace and blessing for this poor world will constitute nothing but woe for the dwellers upon earth?

This, however, will explain to us the contrariety between heaven and earth that follows. The moment the declaration is made that Christ has established His world-sovereignty, "*the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats* [*thrones*], *fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come;* because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry,*" etc. (*vv.* 16–18.) What a contrast! That which causes joy in heaven produces anger upon earth. The nations are angry; for they have usurped the power belonging to God, thrown off His yoke, and now will be made to know that they are amenable to the authority of Him, who will smite through kings in the day of His wrath, who will judge among the heathen, fill the places with the dead bodies, and wound the heads over many countries. The elders, on the other hand, have the mind of God; they have had His patience in the presence of Satan's power, and of the evils which have corrupted the earth; they had known what it was to have fellowship with a rejected Christ, and now they rejoice with full hearts that God has stepped in, asserted His rights, and vested the sovereignty of the earth in the hands of His Christ. The Lamb that was in the midst of the throne is now the exalted One on the earth; and all kings must fall down before Him, and all nations must serve Him; and the hearts of the elders, charged to overflowing with heaven's joy, express their gladness in thanksgivings and worship before God.

* "This clause "art to come" should be omitted

A few points in connection with the elders may be noticed. We are again reminded that they sat on their thrones before God. It is not so much that they were sitting there at this moment, although they were doing so, as that their place in the presence of God is thus indicated. It is characteristic; the elders occupied thrones before God. What a view is in this way afforded of the exaltation of the glorified saints! Grouped around the Eternal Presence, and seated themselves on thrones—for they are kings as well as priests—they are spectators, adoring spectators, of God's ways in the government of the earth. It will also be observed that they worship God as revealed in the Old Testament; viz., as Lord God Almighty (Jehovah Elohim Shaddai), and for the reason that it is now the question of God's kingdom on earth—"because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned." The words "and art to come," as already said, are to be omitted, and this is significant. No doubt the eternity of God is expressed in the threefold phrase—"which art, and wast, and art to come"—present, past, and future. But when used in reference, as here, to the earth, the kingdom, the future is, so to speak, merged in the present, for He has come and taken to Himself His great power. (Compare chapter i. 8.)

The effect of the assumption of the sovereignty of the world by the Christ of God is then given by the elders: "*And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*" (*v.* 18.) It is a general, and only a general, statement of the consequences of the establishment of the kingdom in power,

and thus reaches down even to its close, inasmuch as it is not until then that the dead will be judged. (See chap. xx.) There are three things specified; first, *the anger of the nations*, and this may include the gathering together of the kings of the earth, with their armies, under the leadership of the beast (chapter xix. 19) to make war against Christ as He comes from heaven with His army, and the nations from the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, gathered together by Satan at the close of the thousand years (chapter xx. 7–9); secondly, *the wrath of God*, as seen in judging the dead, and in destroying them which destroyed the earth; and lastly, *blessing* in giving reward to His servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear His name, both small and great. This is not the heavenly blessing of the church, of the saints of this dispensation. In this scene they are already on high, and they, with all indeed who share in the first resurrection, will come forth with Christ when He takes His kingdom; but the reward here spoken of is for the kingdom—for the saints on earth in the kingdom. That there are special rewards also for other saints in the kingdom is quite true, only the specification here of "prophets, saints, and those that fear thy name" would seem rather to mark out earthly and not heavenly saints.

The third woe has now been inflicted. The first was characterized by Satan's power, and its subjects were apostate Jews; the second was human in its instrumentality, and this was visited upon the Roman empire; the last is emphatically God's woe, and it falls upon the nations in general, inasmuch as it is connected with the setting up of Messiah's kingdom.

It may aid the reader to point out that in this last woe, the end of the forty-two months, or the 1260 days

(chapter xi. 2, 3), *i.e.*, the prophetic half week of this book, concluding the seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy (chapter ix. 25–27) has been reached; and that thus, as to time, it coincides with chapter xix. 11–16. The succeeding chapters must not therefore be read as following consecutively in the history; for, as pointed out, we have now arrived at the terminus, the kingdom of Christ established. Details are afterwards given, fuller developments, specific instruction as to many events, the inflictions of still severer judgments, and, above all, the direct connection of heaven with what transpires on earth, together with the divine interest expressed and manifested towards those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, those who, amid general apostasy, are found faithful, not loving their lives unto the death.

CHAPTER XII.

THIS chapter really commences with the last verse of that preceding. The temple of God was opened in heaven, and in it the ark of His covenant is seen. This indicates at once that Israel is coming into view, and that God is about to renew His dealings with His people on the basis of His everlasting covenant. But signs of judgment —lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail are connected with this scene; for it is in judgment that God will proceed to establish His covenant and restore His people to His favour and blessing —judgment upon His enemies, and also upon His people. (See Psalms lxxxiii., xciv., xcvii.; Isaiah lxvi.; Zechariah xii.–xiv., &c.) There are thus judgments here proceeding from above, and convulsions below, which will precede the making of the new covenant with the house of Israel of which Jeremiah speaks. (Chap. xxxi. 31.) Unmingled blessing will follow.

Coming to the chapter itself, we find in it "a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God." This important and comprehensive sentence, if rightly understood, will unfold to the reader the means of solving all the symbols of the chapter. It may further assist, if it is pointed out that the sphere of these "wonders" and visions is "in

heaven." (See *vv.* 1, 3, 7, 10.) First seen there, and seen according to God, divine intelligence will be possessed for the exposition of the events on earth which the visions shadow forth.

In the first place, "*There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.*" (*vv.* 1. 2.) There is no difficulty whatever in identifying the woman with Israel, but with Israel as it appears in the purpose of God. It must be remembered also that Jerusalem is often taken in Scripture as the expression of the people, and hence it is that she is continually regarded as the earthly bride. But when so viewed, it is always as standing for the whole nation. (See Gal. iv. 25; Isaiah xlix. 13–26.) Three things mark her. First, she is clothed with the sun. The sun, as has been seen before, is an emblem of the fount of supreme authority, in accordance with the place assigned to it in creation. It is the "greater light to rule the day." (Gen. i.) Israel therefore is here seen as invested with supreme earthly authority. Even in the days of the kingdom, God dwelt between the cherubim; it was there in the temple that He had His earthly throne; and in the days yet to come Messiah's throne will be in Jerusalem, and from thence He will govern the nations upon earth. (Isaiah lx.) Secondly, the moon is under her feet. Two things characterize the moon; she is the lesser light to rule the night, and her light is derived and reflected from the sun. We are therefore plainly pointed back, by this symbol, to the glory possessed by Israel under the first covenant. All the light she had in former days, and there was no light elsewhere upon earth, was derived from the presence of Jehovah in

her midst, and from the sacred oracles committed to her care. The moon thus fittingly symbolizes this her past glory, and is now seen, in the presence of the splendours of the sun (compare Isaiah lx. 20), as under her feet. Finally, she is crowned with twelve stars; that is, she has also the glory of perfect administration in man, which is the symbolic significance of the number twelve, Our Lord thus said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. xix. 28.) It is needless to add that Israel has never yet corresponded on earth to this divine portraiture; but "in heaven" God has always seen her arrayed in this perfect beauty. So in the wilderness of old, whatever the state of things in the camp, the seven lights of the golden candlestick were ever burning in their perfection, and the twelve loaves of the continual shewbread, covered with their pure frankincense, were at all times duly ordered in the holy place before the Lord. It is an immense encouragement to turn away from the actual state of things, whether in Israel or in the church, and to contemplate both the one and the other as they are seen in all their perfection in the purposes of God. (Compare Numbers xxiii., xxiv.)

We have next the circumstances of the woman—travailing in birth; but before the birth of the man-child another wonder is seen in heaven: "*Behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was*

born." (*vv.* 3, 4.) This dragon, the enemy of God and His Christ, is declared to be "that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan" (*v.* 9); but he is viewed here as identified with the revived Roman empire. This is seen in two ways: his colour is red, not purple, which is specially the imperial colour, but red here because presented under a persecuting, sanguinary aspect; and he has seven heads and ten horns, the same as the beast in the next chapter. (*v.* 1.) It is, moreover, distinctly declared that "the dragon gave him [the beast] his power, and his seat, and great authority." (Chap. xiii. 2.) Here therefore the source is unveiled, and Satan himself is presented as possessing all that he afterwards bestows upon man in government. (Compare Luke iv. 5–7.) The seven crowned or diademed heads are forms of power, and, taking the number seven in its usual significance, it will portend that as to these there is completeness. But he has only ten horns, administrative instrumental powers, and, since twelve is the number of perfect government in man, he is, as to these, incomplete. The next thing stated is, that his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the ground. That is to say, in his progress, or march, to supremacy on the earth in the form of the Roman empire, his masterpiece of craft and energy in the last half-week, he overthrows, casts down, all the subordinate powers that had existed in the area of the "third part," in order to substitute the absolute power and despotism of the imperial head, as seen in the first beast of the next chapter.

All this description is introductory to the position of the dragon here exhibited: he stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. We thus learn that Satan knew

of the promised seed, the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head, of the expected advent of David's Son and David's Lord, the One who would reign until all enemies should be subdued; and that, in his enmity to God and man, he lay in wait to destroy the true Heir as soon as He might appear. In the gospels we have the record of the manner in which he sought to compass his ends. Through Herod he endeavoured to destroy the child Jesus; in the wilderness he attempted to allure Him from the path on which He had entered; he stirred up and evoked the bitter hate of the scribes and Pharisees to accomplish his purpose; and, finally, he succeeded in banding together Jew and Gentile, all the factions of Judaism with their oppressors, high and low, rich and poor, every form of earthly power; and the Object of his malice was condemned to die, and was crucified. Apparently the dragon had devoured the Child; but, as every believer knows, what seemed to be Satan's triumph became the means of his everlasting disgrace and defeat. It was God who had triumphed, having made the wrath of man to praise Him, and having bound the "dragon" to the chariot wheels of His eternal purposes of grace and mercy in and through the redemption wrought out by means of the death of His beloved Son.

The frustration of Satan's object is now related: "*And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.*" (*v.* 5.) How entirely all here concerns the earth is seen from the fact, that no mention whatever is made of the church period: the kingdom alone is specified. If Christ is born, it is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, according to Psalms

ii. and cx. The cross is not even mentioned, although we know it preceded His being caught up unto God and to His throne.

Christ then has now been born into the world, and, Satan having proved his powerlessness against the Lord's Anointed, He has been caught up, raised from the dead, and has been set in the place of power at God's right hand. The next verse goes on to a time *after the church period*—the last half-week of prophecy, which immediately precedes the introduction of the kingdom of Christ on the earth. Not only therefore is Christ in this scene on high, but the church also, if not mentioned, has been caught up; and this is proved, as will afterwards be explained, by verse 10. In the mind of God then the church is included in Christ, being caught up, seen, as it were, in Him; so that now, as pointed out (and the reader should pay especial attention to it), Christ has the church with Himself above. The heavenly saints are thus, even as Christ was, snatched away from Satan's rage; for in truth he was and is as powerless against them as against Christ Himself. (See Matthew xvi. 18; Romans viii. 31–39.)

The Child was caught away, but the woman was left behind, and, as so left, is also exposed to Satan's enmity. Hence "*she fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.*" (*v.* 6.) The woman it must be remembered is Israel—Israel as seen in the purposes of God; and Satan, having been disappointed in his rage against Christ, turns only all the more fiercely against God's beloved people. But God cares for Israel, even as He had cared for the "Man-child"; and in His providence He watches over, protects, provides for, and

sustains her. Like Elijah of old, she is screened from observation in a place prepared for her in the desert, and she is as miraculously fed during the whole period of Satan's unchecked domination in and through the Roman Empire—the 1260 days.

Another scene in heaven is next recorded: "*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*" (*vv.* 7, 8.) That Satan has access into the "heavenly places" is revealed in several scriptures (see especially Ephesians vi. 12); and we also know that he ever acts there in opposition to the people of God. (Job i., ii.; Zech. iii. 1; Luke xxii. 31, 32.) It would seem that he takes up there what has been aptly designated an anti-priestly position; that is, instead of interceding for, he accuses the saints, in order to deprive them of blessing and to secure their ruin. It is evident also from this scripture that he has an army of evil angels at his service. Michael and his angels fight against the dragon. The reason that Michael appears on the scene is that Israel is in question as the object of Satan's hostility; for, as we learn from Daniel, Michael is the angelic prince of God's ancient people. (Daniel x. 21.) He is "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." (Chapter xii. 1.) In Jude he is termed the archangel, and there also he is "contending with the devil," when disputing with him about the body of Moses. As no other archangel is named it would appear that he is the angelic chief; and, from what has been gathered from the Book of Daniel, that his special service is to frustrate the devices of Satan against Israel. This will explain the "war" in heaven as described in our scripture. There could be but one issue

to it; and thus "*the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan,*" the evil spirit that deceiveth the whole habitable world, of which he is the prince and the god. He "*was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*" (*v.* 9.) He loses now for ever his place in the heavens; and henceforth the scene of his activities is bounded by the habitable world, where he is still permitted, in pursuance of the divine purposes, to be a test for man, until the moment decreed for his own eternal doom.

His expulsion from heaven is celebrated by a loud voice, which John heard, "*saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*" (*v.* 10.) This loud voice in heaven explains two things; first, that the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven was connected with, and preliminary to, the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, such being the import, we apprehend, of the words, "Now is come," &c.; and secondly, it gives the justification of the interpretation that the church is regarded as caught up together with the Man-child; for the voice speaks of *our* brethren whom Satan had accused night and day before God.

The next verse reveals the secret and means of their victory over Satan's efforts. They overcame him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, that precious blood by which they had been redeemed, which had answered all God's claims, and which had made them whiter than snow. Satan could not therefore sustain his accusations, and God could not righteously listen to them, for He beholds no iniquity in those who are under the efficacy of the blood of Christ. The weapon of their conflict was the word of

their testimony, the irresistible sword of the Spirit; and their courage was displayed in the fact that they loved not their lives unto the death. So Paul, with the prospect of martyrdom before him, had a desire to depart to be with Christ, which he esteemed to be very much better. What could Satan do with one who had no more conscience of sins, who was armed with the sword of the Spirit, and whose hopes were all outside of this world?

This passage is interesting in another way. The church has been caught up; the Jewish remnant who will come into the place of testimony after the church period is distinguished in the last verse of our chapter, so that these victors, the "our brethren" of verse 10, mark a third class. They are the saints who suffer martyrdom after the rapture of the church, and before the appearing of Christ, who, in addition to those who "had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands," will be added to the first resurrection (chap. xx. 4), and who, therefore, are regarded as heavenly saints—saints of the heavenly places.

The casting of Satan down to earth produces joy in heaven; but it is woe to the earth and the sea;* for, expelled from heaven, he rages all the more violently, and as knowing "that he hath but a short time." (*v.* 12.) The first object of his wrath is the woman which brought forth the Man-child, on the principle that whatever is God's special object excites his special malice. Verse 14, we judge, is but a restatement, with additions, of verse 6; but we learn now that God gives to the woman the means of escape. For the Christian it is, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," but for the "woman," having no

* The words "inhabiters of" have no sufficient authority.

power of resistance, flight, and means for it, as symbolized by the "two wings of a great eagle," are divinely ordered. (Compare Matt. xxiv. 15–21.) Hidden thus in the wilderness, she has "her place," and is nourished, divinely sustained, "for a time, and times, and half a time" (that is, three years and a half, or 1260 days), "from the face of the serpent." (*v.* 14.) The serpent, baffled in his object, "cast out of his mouth water as a flood" to overwhelm the "woman"; but the "*earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*" (*vv.* 15, 16.) This symbolism is simple. "Water as a flood," or river, sets forth a disturbed state of the nations, but flowing onward in some special course. The earth, on the other hand, is a figure of organization or ordered government. There was, therefore, a movement of the nations, instigated by Satan, towards the destruction of the "woman," or Israel; but this movement is arrested, under God's providential hand, by the ordered governments of the world, and Israel is secured. Once more baffled, the dragon, "*wroth with the woman,*" goes "*to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus.*" (*v.* 17.) These are the individual Jews who compose the remnant, the remnant of the Psalms who will be found in Jerusalem and Judæa during the last half-week (see Matt. xxiv.), and who are marked by keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus; that is, the spirit of prophecy. (See chap. xix. 10.) They are, therefore, on Old Testament ground, and are characterized by Jewish feelings and Jewish hopes. Such will be the testimony of the remnant of the last days before the return of Christ in glory.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the previous chapter the fact of Satan's hostility to the "woman" and her seed is stated: in this the means or the instrumentalities by which he pursues his ends are detailed. They are the two "beasts" who, during Daniel's last half-week, or the 1260 days, will be allowed to exercise their undisputed sway in opposition to God, to His Christ, and to His people. The scene of the visions in the last chapter is in heaven. Here the stand-point of the prophet is the sand of the sea. He writes, "*And I stood* upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name† of blasphemy.*" (*v.* 1.) If we now turn to the prophet Daniel it will aid us in the interpretation of this vision. He says, "I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." The first, he tells us, "was like a lion, and had eagle's wings;" the second "like to a bear;" the third "like a leopard;" but the fourth was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were

* Some read, "And *he* stood," &c. In that case it would refer to the dragon; but the context is, as we judge, in favour of the accepted text.

† The more generally accepted reading is "*names.*"

before it; and it had ten horns." We learn, moreover, that this fourth beast will continue until the Ancient of days shall sit; and that, on the beast having been slain, the dominion and glory and kingdom are given to One like the Son of man. (Daniel vii.; see also chapter ii.) From the same prophet we learn that the first three "beasts" represent the monarchies of Babylon, Persia, and Greece; and we also know from Scripture that the successor of Greece in sovereignty over the prophetic earth is the Roman Empire. Observe, moreover, that this last form of Gentile sovereignty continues until the end; and this enables us at once to identify the first beast of our chapter with Daniel's fourth beast. We also find from verse 2, that this beast of the Apocalypse combines in himself all the characteristics of his three predecessors, for he was "*like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.*" At the time of John's vision the first three beasts and their kingdoms had for ever passed away. The fourth had come into their place, and had inherited all their characteristic features, as well as their sovereignty.

We may now examine the vision a little more closely. The beast rises up out of the sea, looking back to the origin of the Roman Empire, though seen here in its developed character at the end. The sea is a figure for a disturbed state of the nations, masses of the people in commotion, as, for example, in times of insurrection or revolution. It was out of such a state of things that the Roman dominion had sprung into existence. There has been in modern days a remarkable exemplification of a similar phenomenon. The first Napoleon suddenly emerged into view out of the confusion of a revolutionary period, and very soon asserted his power, and extended his sway

over the half of Europe. The difference is only in the fact that in his case it was the sudden rise of a person more like the little horn of Daniel vii.; whereas here it was rather the Roman power, although seen at the end incarnated in an individual head.

This beast, the imperial head of the revived Roman Empire, has seven heads, or forms of government, and, as pointed out in chapter xii., therein completeness; and he has ten horns, on all of which are diadems, indicating the fact repeated again and again (see Daniel ii., vii.; also Revelation xvii. 12), that the dominion of the beast is composed of ten kingdoms, having their respective sovereigns, but allied together in a common federation under his imperial sway.

The moral character of this last representative of Gentile sovereignty is exhibited in one word—he has upon his heads the names of blasphemy. He not only is indifferent to God and His claims, but he is in open and wicked opposition to Him, and avowedly so before the eyes of men. Does anyone wonder that such a monster could be tolerated on the earth? If so, let him remember that a neighbouring country has recently had infidel and atheistic governments; and that, in response to the invitation of such, thousands could rush over from "Christian" England to assist at the commemoration of a revolution which sought to dethrone God and to deify man and the reason of man. Ah, no, men were not shocked; for indeed the course of modern thought and of politics is fast paving the way for the apostasy, and the appearance of these names of blasphemy, adorned, as they will be, with all that which excites the admiration of man as man. The rule of this last Gentile monarch will be the expression of all the preceding monarchies. He will be distinguished

by the strength and majesty of the first, the voracity of the second, and the swiftness of the third, added to his own irresistible and relentless power. (See Daniel vii. 4–7 with verse 2.)

We have next the source of his dominion unveiled. "*And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.*" (*v.* 2.) He is therefore characterized by Satan's inspiration and energy. Such is the picture presented to us, delineated by an infallible hand, of the last governmental power on the earth, before the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom.

In the following verses we have a brief and figurative description of the resuscitation of the Roman empire, and an account of the place and supremacy of its head during his brief career. "*And I saw,*" says John, "*one of his heads, as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world* [the whole earth] *wondered after the beast.*" (*v.* 3.) In chapter xvii. we read, "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." (*vv.* 9–11.) Combining these two scriptures, and recalling the fact that the heads are symbols of forms of government, or governing powers ("kings"), the interpretation is not difficult. At the time of the vision five of these governing powers, in the various vicissitudes of the Roman dominion, had passed away; but "one *is*" said the angel, and that one was the imperial, for Rome then had its emperors. There was, however, another to arise before the advent of the beast, one who, like and perhaps Napoleon I., was to "continue a short space," and

then, with what interval we are not told, the beast would appear, an eighth; for Satan ever imitates, and thus even here would dazzle the minds of men by the semblance of a resurrection (of which "eight" is the symbolic number). But while the beast is the eighth, he is yet of the seven, and only, therefore, possesses seven heads. The conclusion from these scriptures is evidently that the "head," wounded as it were to death, was the imperial one, seen too in the fact of the destruction and disappearance of the old Roman empire, which to-day, and for centuries past, save in the attempt of Napoleon to revive it, has clean gone from human view. When, therefore, we are told that the "deadly wound was healed," it will mean that this imperial form of govenment will be restored in connection with the beast of our chapter.* It is this unexpected revival that will astonish, and excite the admiration of, "the whole earth."

Two effects follow, effects awful to contemplate, but none the less certain. First, "*they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast.*" (*v.* 4.) And who are the "they"? The eighth verse, though speaking there of the beast, answers the question. They are all those who are outside of God's elect saints, elect saints on earth, after the rapture of the church. It will include, therefore, the inhabitants of the prophetic earth, where Christianity was once professed, but who now, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, are under "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.) Such is to be the final issue of modern

* These eight heads are often, and probably truly, reckoned thus: (1) Kings, (2) Consuls, (3) Dictators, (4) Decemvirs, (5) Military Tribunes, (6) Cæsars, (7) Napoleon I., (8) The Beast out of the abyss. These will include all the governmental heads of the Roman Empire until the appearing of Christ.

civilization, progress in thought, art, and science—men will pay homage to Satan. It is not only that they will have cast off all fear of God from before their eyes, but they will also enthrone Satan in His place. Secondly, they will likewise worship the beast. They will "worship" him because of his wisdom and power; for so blinded will they be, that they will not be able to discern between what is of Satan and what is of God. Adumbrations of this Satanic delusion are constantly seen, when men prostrate themselves before statesmen, or warriors, on account of their genius, "foresight," and skill in the conduct of affairs. The private lives of the objects of their homage may be never so corrupt, but all is condoned under the influence of their intellectual brilliance.

The character, duration, and exploits of the beast are next given. The reader will remark the repetition of the phrase, there was "given unto him" (*vv.* 5, 7), a phrase explained by verses 2 and 4, reminding us that not only is the beast's power derived, but also that it was derived from Satan. The time, it must be remembered, is after the church has been caught away, and before the appearing of Christ, an interval during which God will own no power on the earth until He takes His own in the person of the true King. First of all the beast has a mouth "*speaking great things and blasphemies.*" (*v.* 5.) He will be a boaster, puffed up, like his god Satan, with the sense of his own merits and excellencies; and in his daring impiety he will open "*his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.*" (*v.* 6.) He cannot rid himself of God, of heaven, or of the heavenly saints, but in the impotence of his rage, exulting in his earthly supremacy, he vents his wicked heart in insolent blas-

phemies. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have him in derision. In the next place, we find again that the duration of his career will be forty and two months—the 1260 days, the last half-week of Daniel's prophecy, completing his seventy weeks. (See Rev. xi. 2, xii. 6–14.)*

Two other particulars are added: "*It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" (*vv.* 7, 8.) The saints against whom he will wage war are those specified in the previous chapter (*v.* 17), he being in this, as indeed in all else, but Satan's instrument. God allows them to be overcome (compare Matt. xxiv. 9, 10), not all of them as we learn after, but many, to test their faith, and to purify His people in the furnace of affliction.

* As this period of time has often been mentioned, it may be stated, for the information of the reader, that Daniel's seventy weeks, weeks of years, and therefore 490 in all, date "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. ix. 25); that is, from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. (See Neh. ii.) This is believed to correspond with 454 or 455 B.C. The seventy weeks are divided by Gabriel into three periods—seven, sixty-two, and one. "Unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks"; and hence after Christ came the last week only remained. But He was rejected, and the predicted era of blessing has consequently been postponed; and we thus read of that last week, the seventieth, appearing in connection with a covenant to be made with the mass of the Jewish people by the future head of the Roman empire, the first beast of Revelation xiii. (See Dan. ix. 27.) This covenant is broken in the middle of the week, and it is the last half of it that forms the 1260 days or the 42 months of Revelation. For faith the ministry of Christ occupied the first half of the last week; and hence it is that, whether in Matthew xxiv. or in Revelation, we have only the record of the last half, the 1260 days.

Moreover, the beast will be irresistible in his might, for "all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" will acknowledge his sway. Save the elect, all men also will worship the beast —all that dwell upon the earth, and this expression now, losing its special moral significance, will include every one, within this sphere, except God's people. It will only be the revival of the old Roman custom of paying homage, and offering incense, to images of the emperor. This relic of heathenism is shocking enough to the Christian mind, but in the deification of intellect and human power, already proceeding with such rapid steps, the way will be easily prepared for its restoration. All these who will worship the beast are said not to have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. (Compare chapter xx. 15.) Those whose names were written in it did not therefore join in this idolatrous worship. One point of difference between the earthly saints thus negatively indicated and the heavenly saints may be noted. The latter are said to be chosen in Christ *before* the foundation of the world, whereas the former's election only dates *from* the world's foundation. It is but another proof of how carefully the saints that form the church, as united to Christ, are distinguished from all others, whatever their blessedness.

This part of the chapter closes with a special proclamation. Solemn attention is called to it by the cry, "*If any man have an ear, let him hear*"; and then it is added, "*He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.*" (*vv.* 9, 10.) Two things are here contained. First, the assurance that divine judgment should surely fall upon the beast, the persecutor of the saints, and that he should be dealt with

in the manner in which he had dealt with them (see Psalm cxxxvii. 8); and, secondly, that the attitude of the saints in the midst of this unparalleled tribulation must be one of "unresisting patience," the attitude of our Lord Himself, who, when the hour of man and the power of darkness had come, suffered Himself to be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." The faith and patience of the saints would be displayed in their confidence in God, and in their meek endurance of the fiery trial through which they would have to pass. (Compare Jeremiah xv. 2.)

THE ANTICHRIST.

Chapter xiii. 11–18.

In this section of our book we have no less a personage than the antichrist introduced. Again and again his appearance on the scene is predicted, both by prophets of the Old Testament and by apostles of the New; and now, at last, we are permitted to see him emerge into view, and to read the character of his power and kingdom as delineated by the Spirit of God through His servant John. In a few brief words this diabolical instrument is described: "*And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.*" (*v.* 11.)

Unlike the first beast of this chapter, who rose up out of the sea, out of the masses of the people in a state of lawless confusion, antichrist comes up out of the earth. The earth is a symbol of organized and ordered government, and we learn, therefore, that he gets his place in a regular governmental or political manner—obtains his sway after a legal form; and consequently his position

will be in accord with the civil and political arrangements of the period.

Before proceeding to consider the account here given, it may be well to answer two or three questions to enable the reader to pursue the subject more intelligently. First, then, it may be enquired, Have we any information as to who the antichrist will be? From a passage in Daniel it appears that he will be a Jew, an apostate Jew. Speaking of "the king," who undoubtedly is the antichrist (compare Daniel xi. 36 with 2 Thess. ii. 4), he says, "Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers" (xi. 37), that is, Jehovah as revealed to Israel. Our Lord's words point to the same conclusion. He said, speaking to the Jews, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." (John v. 43.) The very contrast drawn with Himself shows that our Lord had antichrist in view; and it is thus sufficiently plain, without adducing other scriptures bearing on the point, that this false usurper will spring out of the Jewish nation.

This conclusion, together with many indications in the Apocalypse, enables us with certainty to determine the next point as to the place and seat of his power. It will be Jerusalem; for at that time the Jews will have returned in unbelief, and will have built their temple (see chapter xi.), and, as a consequence, will be morally ready to receive a false Christ. (See Matthew xxiv.) The apostle Paul declares plainly that this "man of sin," "the son of perdition," will sit "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is god" (2 Thess. ii. 4); and we know the temple will be at Jerusalem. Lastly, we may again answer the question as to the period indicated. It has been already explained, more than once, that these events take place

after the rapture of the church, and before the appearing of Christ.

This is entirely corroborated by the apostle's statement in 2 Thess. ii. He says, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he ['the man of sin'] might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [restraineth], will let [restrain], until he be taken out of the way.* And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." (*vv.* 6–8.) The Spirit of God in the church, though the mystery of iniquity already works, restrains, and will restrain the manifestation of the evil in the person of the "son of perdition"† until He departs with the church. Then room is made for the revelation of this incarnation of evil, and he will continue until destroyed by the Lord Himself at His appearing. It is clear, therefore, beyond all question, that the interval between the Lord's coming for His saints and His appearing in glory is the period of antichrist's rise and power.

Returning now to our chapter, two things are specially noted. First, this beast had two horns like a lamb. Claiming to be the expected Messiah, he imitates, assumes the appearance of, the true Christ. He was like a lamb in the vision; and, moreover, he had two horns; he had,

* It has sometimes been contended that this clause ought to be translated, "until he be developed out of the midst," and many quotations from the classics are given in support; the object being to prove that the church will be here at the same time as antichrist, and thus will have to pass through the great tribulation. Having been at some pains to examine the alleged use of the phrase, we found that in no single instance did the citation sustain the contention.

† The careful reader will recall the fact that the Lord applies this term to Judas.

that is, two of the forms of power which Christ as the Messiah will exercise. These are here the forms of prophetic and kingly power. Satan could not now give the third form, that of the priest; for he had lost his anti-priestly place when he was cast down out of heaven. (See chapter xii. 9, 10.) The other two he bestows upon his blind tool that he might lure therewith the Jewish nation to destruction. As ever, he will resort to imitation in order to deceive the unwary, and to accomplish their eternal ruin. (Compare 2 Cor. xi. 13–15; 2 Tim. iii. 8.) Assume, however, whatever appearance he may, he cannot morally change his nature; for he spake as a dragon. The dragon is Satan (chap. xii.; also verses 2, 3), and hence, if lamblike in form, his speech betrays him. Those taught of God, therefore, spite of his pretensions, will discern his true character; for the sheep know the voice of the good Shepherd, and they know not the voice of strangers. (John x.) So too, as we read in John's epistle, the babes in the family of God, warned against the many antichrists already in the world, shadows and forerunners of *the* antichrist, are reminded that they have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things. No saint of God, therefore, need be led astray, however specious the deception presented.

We have next the twofold form of his power—what may be termed civil, or governmental, and religious power. "*And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*" (*v.* 12.) We gather from the first part of this description that antichrist will be a kind of vicegerent of the imperial head of the Roman Empire; and consequently that he will be sustained in his position by all that monarch's forces.

There may be a special reason for this. It is evident from other scriptures that antichrist, during his sway, will be exposed to attacks from the "king of the north," or the Assyrian (see Daniel xi. 40–45); and it would seem from another prophecy, that antichrist will enter into a league with the Roman power to make common cause against his adversary. (See Isaiah xxviii. 14–22.) This may account for the fact here stated that he exercises all the power of the first beast before it. In return for the Roman support he assumes the office of prophet to the imperial head, and compels men to worship the first beast. It was a common thing for Roman emperors in the past to demand divine honours; and once more, as we here learn, the same thing will be witnessed in the world's history. The almost miraculous resuscitation of the imperial governmental form of power, when the "deadly wound" is healed (*v.* 3), will make the world wonder after the beast, and will, at the same time, prepare the way for its deification. The poor world, with all its vaunted wisdom and enlightenment, will be unable to distinguish between divine and Satanic power. And the culmination of its progress and civilization will be seen in the worship of the image of a man. Men will readily fall into the snare under the blinding influences of the strong delusion which God, in judgment, will send upon them, "that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned [judged] who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.)

Moreover, he will sustain his claims by miraculous displays of power. Like Elijah, he will cause fire to "*come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men*"; and even as the Lord Himself, he will work miracles to accredit his mission (compare 2 Thess. ii. 9), and to prove

the first beast's title to divine homage. Thereby he will deceive "*them that dwell on the earth,*" and induce them to "*make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.*" (*v.* 14.)

He is permitted to go still further under the inspiration of Satan; for he will have "*power to give life* [not life, but *breath*] *unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.*" (*v.* 15.) Nebuchadnezzar went far, when he erected his image of gold in the plain of Dura, and issued a decree that all men should worship it, with the penalty of the burning fiery furnace if they refused. Antichrist will go still further; for his image, instinct with its diabolical breath, and the mouthpiece of Satan in its utterances, will fill the minds of its worshippers with fear and dread, so that all, excepting the elect of God (*v.* 8), will be constrained to obey the behest of antichrist, and to offer their homage to this creature of hell. They would not have God, and now they must worship Satan. Alas for man when he falls under the unhindered power of the devil!

Antichrist proceeds to regulate even commerce. He will cause "*all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*" (*vv.* 16, 17.) He will thus form a vast organization, composed of all save those whose names were written from the foundation of the world in the slain Lamb's book of life, outside of which it will not be lawful to buy or sell. Every member of it must bear the mark of allegiance to the beast in order to possess the liberty to trade. Under the mask of the welfare of the

empire, all will be subjected to this awful tyranny under the pains and penalties of the deprivation of the commonest liberty of the individual. Foreshadowings of this frightful abuse of authority are frequently seen even in this tolerant age, affording a sufficient warning to those whose eyes are opened, that the most absolute despotism may often be cloaked under a profession of the most liberal ideas, and giving also an indication of the ultimate goal of modern politics under the concealed guidance and inspiration of Satan.

The chapter concludes with the number of the beast, which is six hundred and sixty-six. And "*here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man.*" (*v.* 18.) Many have been the attempts to unravel this mystery; but all have been in vain. And we conclude, from the analogy of Scripture, that it will be impossible to discover the secret *before the beast's appearance.* When at length he shall come upon the scene, those who have the wisdom of God will be able to identify him by the number given; and they will thus be divinely forewarned. The indication here afforded is consequently for those who will be in the circumstances described.

It may be helpful to some if we add, that in order to obtain a complete view of the antichrist the various scriptures on the subject must be combined. Here, as before said, we have his actings in Jerusalem, and his relation to the imperial head of the Roman empire; in Daniel we see him menaced by the king of the north, or the Assyrian; in 2 Thess. ii. he is presented in relation to Judaism, which he seeks to set aside and supersede by claiming divine homage for himself; whereas in John's epistle he is seen as the denier of the Father and the Son; that is, of Chris-

tianity as so revealed. (1 John ii. 22; see also 2 John 7.) What a contrast between the Christ of God and the antichrist of Satan! And let it not be forgotten that the mystery of lawlessness is already working, that many antichrists are abroad at this moment in the world, who, by their specious and subtle reasonings upon the word of God, are fast preparing the minds of men for the total rejection of all revealed truth, and thus to accept the guidance of Satan in the place of that of the Holy Spirit of God.*

* The attempt has often been made to unravel the mystery of the number 666 by "calculations according to the Greek value of the constituent letters" of the supposed name of antichrist. This has opened the door, as will readily be perceived, to endless speculations. One of the earliest solutions offered was "Lateinos"; and a current one is "Napoleon," the letters in both cases, when taken according to their Greek numerical values, making up the required 666. But, as observed in the text, the solution of the number will never be reached until the actual appearance of antichrist. Then, and not till then, his correspondence with the prediction will be easily detected by God's people on the earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN the two previous chapters we have the record of Satan's activity, through his chosen instruments, in his attempt to place his yoke upon all the inhabitants of the earth. All his malice and hatred are directed against God, against His Christ, and against His people. For the moment, as also when our Lord was crucified, he *seems* to be victorious; he has asserted his power, and his sway is almost undisputed. Evil, and evil in its own native blackness and corruption, is triumphant.

In contrast with this, chapter xiv. opens like a magnificent sunrise after a stormy night. It is a burst of light which contains the promise that all the clouds that had obscured the scene will be swept away. "*And I looked, and, lo, a*" (rather, the) "*Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name* written in their foreheads.*" (*v.* 1.) This, as is often the case in this book, is an anticipative vision, revealing the end for the comfort of the saints, before the judgments are detailed which lead up to this point. In chapter xiii. the frightful oppression and persecution of the saints is seen; and in this vision they are displayed as having been tried and come forth as gold, and, as the result, enjoying a special place of association with the Lamb.

Several points in the vision must be observed. As

* The preferred reading is, "His name and the name of His Father."

above indicated, it is *the* Lamb, the Lamb already known as presented in this book. But here He is seen in a new place. In chapter v. He is revealed as standing in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders. Here He stands on mount Sion. John saw Him first "as it had been slain"; and we have thus three successive stages marked: first, the cross; next, His exaltation to the throne of God; and, lastly, His being set as God's King upon His holy hill of Zion. (Psalm ii.) For Zion is the seat of royal grace from David's time and onwards. (See 1 Chron. xxi.; Psalm xlviii.; compare Heb. xii. 22); and consequently Christ is here displayed in the glory of His kingdom. The vision overleaps all the intervening sorrows and judgments, and, as in the scene on the mount of Transfiguration, permits us to behold His majesty and glory in the seat of His earthly rule and dominion.

There are with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand. Who are these? They are not, though the same symbolical number,* those sealed from the twelve tribes in chapter vii.; for the elect remnant out of the ten tribes will not be restored to the land of Israel until after Messiah shall sit upon the throne of His glory; whereas these are the preserved of the two tribes already in the land, those who will have passed through the sorrows of the period before the appearing of Christ, and hence termed "the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb." (*v.* 4.) The ten tribes will not pass through the unparalleled troubles of which the Lord speaks in Matthew xxiv. 15–28, all of which will have their centre in

* Twelve is the number representing the perfection of administrative government in man (in Christ). Twelve times twelve will exhibit this in intensified perfection.

Jerusalem, and will be, as to the Jews, confined to the land. In the restoration from Babylon, of which we read in Ezra, only two tribes were concerned, saving individuals of other tribes, Judah and Benjamin. It was to these two tribes in the land that Christ was presented; but when He came to His own His own received Him not, and on them therefore lay the guilt of His rejection and crucifixion. By these same two tribes, that is, by the mass and their leaders, antichrist will be received; and thus it will be upon them that the chastisements of that day will descend, when the tribulation will be so great that no flesh would be saved, if for the elect's sake the days were not shortened. The 144,000 are these elect, the true remnant, who, in the midst of the apostasy of their brethren, as well as of the seduction and oppression of the antichrist, cleave to God and His truth, and are saved out of this time of Jacob's trouble. (Jer. xxx. 7.) Their weeping had endured for the night, but joy had come in the morning with the interposition of their glorious and looked-for Messiah. (See Isa. xxv. 9.) In this scene we see the full issue of God's grace through their sufferings, in their being made the companions of the Lamb amid the glories of His kingdom.

They are distinguished, moreover, by having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. The name, or the mark, of the beast had been written on the foreheads (or on the hands) of his followers—sign of their apostasy, and of the degrading yoke which they had accepted; but these, the 144,000, have the name of the Lamb, the expression of their allegiance and of their moral likeness to the One they follow, and the name of His (not *their*, because they, whatever their place, have not the Spirit of adoption) Father written on their fore-

heads. They had openly confessed the name of God and the Lamb, and had suffered, short of death,* as Christ had suffered through the confession of the name of His Father. (See John v. 17, 18.) They had therefore come into His former place on earth, in regard to His testimony, however feebly they had occupied it; and now in the abounding grace of God their foreheads are adorned with the names of the Lamb and of His Father, a proclamation to all of their past fidelity, and of the rich recompense which had been awarded to them by Him for whom they had suffered.

It is in connection with the appearance of this elect remnant with the Lamb on mount Zion that John "*heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and*" (he says) "*I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed*† *from the earth.*" (*vv.* 2, 3.) Who these heavenly choristers are we are not told. The voice is "from heaven," and the song is sung before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders. But whoever may be these celebrants of praise, the subject would seem, from the connection, to be that of the victorious issue of the suffer-

* This expression, "short of death," should be well weighed and examined. As pointed out afterwards, they are said to be "without fault," a word used of Christ (Heb. ix. 14), of the church (Eph. v. 27), and of Christians in their final presentation before God. (Col. i. 22.) It is a question, therefore, whether this company may not have passed either through death, or by being changed, into a resurrection—not a heavenly, but a resurrection—condition.

† This should really be rendered "bought." It is remarkable, but very significant, that the word redemption is not found in this book. It is always ἀγοράζειν, and never λυτροῦν.

ings of this chosen remnant, traced back, doubtless, to God's grace and the blood of the Lamb. (Compare chapter v. 9, 10.) This is the more evident from the fact, that no one could learn that song but the 144,000, for none but they had passed through the sorrows or had experienced the grace connected with their deliverance. The song suited to them in their circumstances was raised in heaven; and they, as in communion with the mind of God, caught up and repeated the strains. Happy are the saints of any period when they are enabled to apprehend in any measure the mind of God concerning His beloved Son, and when, with adoring hearts, they can utter, in the power of the Spirit, His worthiness and praise.

Their characteristics follow. First, they had not defiled themselves with women; "*for they are virgins.*" (*v.* 4.) In a scene where all had corrupted themselves they had been kept pure, pure from all the contamination by which they had been surrounded, guarding themselves from all the seductions of antichrist, and keeping themselves alone for Him for whom they waited. They were, it might be said, espoused to Christ, and they walked as chaste virgins amid surrounding defilements. (Compare 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.) Then they "*follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.*" That is, they are His companions in His earthly kingdom. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of the companions of Christ (chap. i. 9; chap. iii. 14*); but these "companions" embrace all Christians; whereas in our scripture they are confined to this suffering, but now victorious, remnant. Surely they will also confess that the sufferings of the past are not worthy to be compared with the glorious position on which they will have then entered. To have

* This may be rendered, "for we are made companions of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

the privilege of being the constant and intimate attendants upon the King in His glory will be the sum and perfection of earthly bliss.

Moreover, they "*were redeemed*" (bought from) among men, being the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb. As with every class of the redeemed in all ages and dispensations, so with these, the blood of Christ alone constitutes their ransom price. Sold through their sins (Isaiah l. 1) into the hand of the enemy, nothing but the precious blood of Christ can redeem any from his power; and hence it is that the fact of the redemption of this elect remnant is here emphasized. As thus "bought," they are the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb, not first-fruits in the sense in which Christ is (1 Cor. xv.), or in which His people are (James i. 18), but the first-fruits of the new scene into which they have been introduced by Messiah's appearing and kingdom.* In this way they become, as it were, the nucleus of the chosen people when God sets His King upon His holy hill of Zion. Once more we are told, that "*in their mouth was found no guile.*"† (*v.* 5.) The question is put in Psalm xv., "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" The answer (among others) is, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, *and speaketh the truth in his heart.*" It is with this last characteristic that the 144,000 correspond, and they are upon God's holy hill of Zion with the Lamb. Having truth in the inward parts, no lie was found in their mouth. Lastly it is added, "*They are*

* It may be also that the term "first-fruits" is used in relation to the harvest in *vv.* 15, 16.

† The better reading is "falsehood"; *for they are without fault.* The words, "Before the throne of God," should be omitted, as also, we judge, the word "for" at the commencement of the clause.

without fault." The word rendered "without fault" is the same as is applied to our Lord in Heb. ix. 14, and 1 Peter i. 19, and given as "without spot." They are therefore meet for the presence of Him whose companions, through His grace, they are. But if spotless, and hence qualified to stand in His immediate presence, it could only be, let it be for ever repeated, through the applied efficacy of His own most precious blood. That, and that alone, cleanses from all sin.

What encouragement, it may be added, does this blessed scene afford. In chapter xiii., as has been remarked, Satan and Satan's power are to the outward eye triumphant; but here we behold the issue in the exaltation of the Lamb in the very place where antichrist had ruled; and in the safety, blessing, and triumph of His redeemed from among men. His sheep never perish, for none can pluck them out of His hand.

THE THREE ANGELIC PROCLAMATIONS; AND THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE JUDGMENT.

Chapter xiv. 6–20.

The whole of this chapter forms a kind of parenthesis. In chapters xii. and xiii. the hand of God is not apparent in the events related, although He reveals His own thoughts concerning His people, and concerning the embodiment of Satan's power in the revived Roman empire, together with its head and the antichrist. At the commencement of chapter xiv., as already seen, we have an anticipative exhibition of the blessed remnant who will be preserved through the fiery trial of that day, and who, associated with the Lamb on mount Zion, will have the privilege

of following Him whithersoever He goeth. Thereupon, coming now to our scripture, there is a solemn call to repentance, and the announcement of coming judgment upon the different forms of evil which have corrupted the earth. It is not that the judgments are yet actually executed; they are rather warnings of what is at hand, visions of what is impending—vouchsafed to John, and here recorded for the comfort and guidance of believers in all ages.

A "day of grace" always precedes judgment. This is shown in the following words: "*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth,* and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him: for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.*" (*vv.* 6, 7.) On the very surface it is clear that this is not the gospel of the grace of God. It contains, indeed, but two things; first, a command to fear God and to give glory to Him, in the prospect of coming judgment; and, secondly, appealing to men on the ground of creation relationship, exhorts them to worship the Creator. Doubtless it is termed the everlasting gospel, because, apart from all special revelations of God, as to Israel and to Christians, and hence beyond all dispensations, God has ever borne to men the relationship of a Creator to His creatures, and as such is entitled to their reverence and adoration. (Compare Romans i. 18–23.) But man has utterly failed in his

* In the correct reading the word "dwell" is not the same as that hitherto noticed as having a moral force. The reason for the change lies probably in the fact that the proclamation has an universal importance.

responsiblity as a creature, and consequently is, on that ground alone, exposed to judgment.*

Then, "*there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*" (*v.* 8.) The moral character of Babylon, and the details of her judgment, are found in chapters xvii. xviii. Any remarks therefore may be reserved till these portions of the book are reached, contenting ourselves now with calling attention to the fact that Babylon represents the religious corruptress of the earth—is, in fact what Rome has ever been, and what Babylon will yet more manifestly be, after Laodicea is rejected as God's responsible witness on the earth. Then she will be "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," and it is on her as such that her righteous doom is here proclaimed.

The civil power comes next under the eye of God, and hence there follows the third angel, "*saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*" (*vv.* 9–11.) What a contrast between God's

* Another has said, "The everlasting gospel is the Seed of the woman that shall bruise the serpent's head; that is, the declaration that the Lord shall destroy with power when He comes in judgment. It is the announcement that the hour of His judgment is come, the unchanging good news from the beginning and onward."

thoughts and those of man! On earth men may agree to cast off all fear of God, to profess to ignore His very existence, and to accept the rule of Satan; but the time is coming when God will intervene, and this solemn warning is written for all who will heed it, that judgment, if delayed, will surely fall upon all who accept the yoke and servitude of the beast. It is instructive, moreover, to note in a day when universalism is so popular, even among professing Christians, the character of the judgment. True that it falls upon a class; but if there were only some who will have to endure their punishment for "ages of ages," and who will "have no rest day nor night," the contention that there is no such thing as "eternal punishment" is utterly disproved. Remark, also, that wherever man takes God's place in the souls of others, wherever men concede to man what belongs to God alone, there is morally the same guilt as that on which these terrible judgments are here pronounced.

It is easy to understand that the faith of the saints in this terrible time of the display of Satan's power will be subjected to no ordinary test. It is in view of this that the Spirit of God adds, "*Here is the patience* [endurance] *of the saints: they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*" (*v.* 12).* These saints are, in fact, the Jewish remnant, those who cleave to the commandments of God, as given in the old dispensation, and who believe in Jesus, spite of the pretensions of antichrist, as the coming Messiah. Tried to the utmost, their constancy will be seen in their holding fast to the word of God, and to their

* The words "here are" before "they that," as in the English version, should be omitted. The last clause of the verse is simply descriptive of the character of the saints.

faith in Jesus all through this period of darkness, and of the frightful energy of evil.

Coupled with this, another class, or a class from among these, comes into view. To keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus, and consequently to refuse to render homage to the beast or to his image, will be to incur the penalty of death, and, as a consequence, numbers will suffer martyrdom. (See chap. xx. 4.) Now death to Jewish saints would be the loss of their special blessings connected with the hope of the coming of their glorious Messiah, of the establishment of His kingdom in power, and of His dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. (Compare Psalm lxxxviii.) It is concerning this class, and the frustration of their earthly hopes, that John receives a special commandment from heaven to write, "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*" (*v.* 13.) Man may be permitted to curse, and to put them to death; but God declares that they are blessed. All who have ever died in the Lord are blessed; absent from the body, they are present with the Lord; but the blessedness of this scripture applies to those whose hopes are not heavenly but earthly, to those who look for blessings on earth under Emmanuel rather than to be with Him in heaven. Cut off from the earth, they are blessed of God, and the Spirit declares it is that they may have rest from their labours; and, while not permitted to see the fruit of their activities on earth, their works shall follow them in heaven. There they will, by God's special grace, reap the reward of their toils. Further, it is revealed (chap. xx.), that they will have the special privilege of being included in the first resurrection, and

thus, to be sharers with the heavenly saints in reigning with Christ. (See verses 4–6.)*

The close is once more reached in the next vision. (See chap. xi. 15–18.) The Man-child, caught up to God's throne, now returns in judgment; and the judgment He will execute is of a two-fold character, here described under the figures of a HARVEST and a VINTAGE. First, we have the description of the Reaper: "*And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.*" (*v.* 14). Both the manner of His advent—on the cloud—and the title—the Son of man—proclaim unmistakably the person of the Reaper. It is the rejected Jesus, who, refused by the Jews when presented to them as the Messiah, took up the wider title of the Son of man (see Psalm viii., Matthew xvi. 20, 27), under which all things are put under His feet. The "golden crown" not only speaks of His royal dignity, but also of the glory of that divine righteousness according to which everything will be both tested and judged, while the "sickle" announces the immediate object of His return. But as when down here He took the servant's place for the accomplishment of the will of God, so when He comes to execute the judgment written He will still occupy the same position. It is on this account that an angel is introduced, as coming out of the temple, and "*crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle,*

* There is another possible interpretation of these words. Immediately following, we have the coming of the Lord in discriminating judgment; and it may be that the blessing pronounced upon those who have died in the Lord (so they are divinely estimated) during the sway of antichrist, refers to their public owning and recompense as seen in chap. xx. The reader must examine and weigh these interpretations.

and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." (*v.* 15.)

There is something sublime in the simple statement of obedience to this command: "*And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.*" (*v.* 16.) As to the character of the judgment here indicated, it may aid the reader to consult Joel iii. 9–17, and Matthew xiii. 36–43. Two or three points may be noticed. It is the *earth* that is reaped, and hence it is men as men, not the Jewish nation especially, that are in question. Secondly, the angel who cried to Him that sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap," came out of the temple. The judgment therefore was to proceed according to the revealed character of Him whose habitation it was. Bearing these points in mind, it is easily understood that the judgment is of a discriminating character, gathering the wheat into His garner, and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. The Scriptures deal constantly with this aspect of the appearing of our Lord and Saviour. In some of the similitudes of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew xiii. it is found; so also in chap. xxv., where the Lord, as the King, will gather all nations before the throne of His glory, and separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. (*vv.* 31–46.)

The scene that follows, while related to the preceding one, has a different character. "*And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, He also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to Him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in Thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in His sickle into the*

earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." (*vv.* 17–19.) The first question to be answered is as to the angel that appears here as the executor of judgment. There cannot be a doubt that, although He is not named, it is also the Son of man; for, as we read elsewhere, the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. (John v. 22–27.) But He is here seen only as an angel, not merely in accordance with the symbology of the book, but because He comes as the divine instrument of God's will in judgment upon the vine of the earth, and hence, in this case, comes out for this purpose from the temple, from God's immediate presence. He is seen as the Son of Man when the judgment relates to the Gentiles; but here as an angel when the Jews are prominent before the mind. For what, we may now enquire, is set forth by the vine of the earth? The figure is familiar. Israel was a vine, brought out of Egypt, and planted in Canaan (Psalm lxxx.), but when God looked for it to bring forth good grapes, nothing was found, notwithstanding all the culture it had received, but wild grapes. (Isaiah v. 1–7.) It was on this account that Christ Himself replaced Israel, before God, as the vine: He became the true vine, of which His own were the branches. (John xv.) The vine of the earth therefore will be that which should have borne fruit for God; and is in the scene before us, inasmuch as it is the object of judgment, apostate Judaism, with which the Gentiles, as we know, will be allied.

The character of the judgment is shown by the words, "the great winepress of the wrath of God." It is thus unsparing judgment (see Isaiah lxiii. 1–4) upon Messiah's adversaries in connection with the establishment of His

kingdom. (See, for example, Zechariah xiv., Revelation xix. 11–21.)

One thing more is to be gleaned from the last verse: "*And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*" (*v.* 20.) The term "without the city" indicates undoubtedly that the neighbourhood of Jerusalem is the locality of this unmitigated vengeance. With this agrees the prophet Joel (as well as Isaiah and Zechariah), who seems to combine in one verse (chap. iii. 2–13) both the harvest and the vintage judgments. He specifies the valley of Jehoshaphat as the place where the nations will be judged, as well as the apostate Jews with whom they will be associated. The terrible character of the vengeance of that day is seen in the awful, if symbolic, statement concerning the blood that came out of the winepress, reaching unto the horse bridles, and extending to 1,600 furlongs; that is, as some have observed, to the whole length of the Holy Land.

CHAPTERS XV., XVI.

THE connection of these chapters is with the thirteenth rather than with that which precedes. The latter, as before observed, is parenthetical. This will be at once seen by the character of the present vision. In chapter xiii. the first and second beasts, the head of the revived Roman empire and the antichrist, are introduced; and the consequent display of Satan's power in spiritual deception and despotic tyranny is exhibited. Here we have the "*seven last plagues*," in which "*is filled up the wrath of God*," brought forth as about to be visited upon the apostate earth, upon that portion of it especially which had accepted Satan's yoke under the deceptive influences of antichrist. The foundations may be destroyed, and the righteous may be almost in despair, but God's throne is still in the heaven; and His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men. (Psalm xi.) After the introduction of the seven angels, having the seven last plagues, there is a significant break, and, as is often the case in Scripture, the end is revealed before the commencement. Or rather, before the storm of God's wrath bursts in all its desolating fury upon the earth, He vouchsafes to us a vision of the issue of the trial for His saints. We are permitted to see them preserved through all the unutterable sorrows of that day, with their hearts overflowing in praise to Him who had protected them from Satan's power, and snatched them as brands from the burning.

John says: "*And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.*" (*v.* 2.) The "sea of glass" is evidently that referred to in chapter iv., where we read, "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal." It is moreover as clear from Solomon's "molten sea" that the allusion is to the laver in the holy place. This contained water as the means of purification; the "sea" before the throne is of glass, or "like unto crystal," the figure of fixed and accomplished holiness, without which these saints could not have been in heaven. But it was "mingled with fire," indicative of the fiery tribulation out of which they had come, and which God had used for the trial and purification of their faith. (See 1 Peter i. 6, 7.) Their characteristic description is also to be remarked: they are those "that had gotten the victory over the beast," etc. To man's eyes they were surely vanquished by his power; but before God they were conquerors through Him that had loved them. So too, in outward appearance, it was with our blessed Lord: "He was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth by the power of God." Man's victories are demonstrative and showy; moral triumphs are silent and unseen, and often accompanied, as with these saints, with the loss of everything in this world. Their occupation is praise: they have harps—symbols of triumphant gladness—and they sing. The character of their song is twofold, "*They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.*" (*v.* 3.) "The song of Moses is triumph over the power of evil by God's judgments. The song of the Lamb is the exaltation of the rejected Messiah, of the suffering One, and like whom they had suffered;

for it is the slain remnant amidst unfaithful and apostate Israel whom we find here."* The allusion will be therefore to Exodus xv., and perhaps, for the song of the Lamb, to Revelation v.

It is interesting to notice that these redeemed ones celebrate God as they had known Him on earth; that is, as revealed in the Old Testament. It is "Lord God Almighty," Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai; showing the immense difference between the place of the Jewish saints and those of the present dispensation. The ground of their praise is God's marvellous works; that is, we apprehend, as seen in the judgments which had fallen upon the oppressors of God's people; and they add, "*Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.*"† (*v.* 3.) The interposition of God in judgment had dispelled all the clouds that had obscured (to sight) His ways in government; but, now that the end is reached, they confess that they were both righteous and true; and righteous and true in relation to the world at large, for He is here owned as King of nations. Faith is assured of this when God's way is in the sea, and His footsteps are not known; still this suffering, but now victorious remnant, sustained by divine power, had gotten the victory over the whole power of evil; and, as they review the past, they gladly confess that all God's ways had been according to Himself, and had ended in the furtherance of His own glory.

In the next place they contemplate the effect of God's judgments. It is but the amplification of the prophet's words, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isaiah

* *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. v., p. 623.

† It should be "nations," not "saints."

xxvi. 9.) They cry, "*Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest.*" (*v.* 4.) These saints, it will be remembered, are in heaven; and it is there they anticipate the full millennial blessedness of the earth in the subjection of all nations to Christ as King; and this as the result of God's judgments having been made manifest. (See Psalm lxxii. 8–11; Zephaniah iii. 8, 9; Zechariah xiv. 16.)

All is thus prepared; and we read: "*And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.*" (*vv.* 5, 6.) As in chapter xi. 19, so here the temple of the tabernacle is opened in heaven; only it is the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony, rather than the ark of the covenant, that is seen. In both alike the significance is that God is about to act in view of Israel, and according to His unchanging purposes of grace towards them; but in the case before us, as "the testimony" is prominent (the testimony, that is, embodied in the two tables of the law), it will indicate that this is the standard according to which God will proceed to judgment through the angels as the providential instruments of His government; and that He is thus about to make good His character as so revealed, according to this testimony.

There are seven angels—this number as usual setting forth the completeness or perfection of that in which they are to be engaged; and their array is distinguished by two things—their pure and white linen dress, and their golden girdles. The white linen is a symbol of

spotless purity, absolute cleanness in God's sight, that which should have been seen, as has been suggested, in Babylon, but superseded there by corruption and "abominations." The golden girdles set forth the fact that these angelic instruments were girded by divine righteousness for their service. The white raiment and the gold (crowns of gold) characterize the twenty-four elders (chap. v.), and "the fine linen," clean and white, distinguishes the Lamb's wife (chap. xix.); and both of these traits mark these angels when sent forth on their judicial mission, because "it is really the avenging of what God was, as fully revealed to the assembly."

It is one of the four living creatures who gives "*unto the seven angels seven golden vials* [or bowls] *full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.*" (*v.* 7.) It is thus the eternal God who is about to deal with the world through these providential scourges. When we say "providential" we mean that His arm will not be made bare, except to the eye of faith; that to the eyes of the natural man the things which will happen will seem to be the result of the operation of natural laws. Science, for example, might be able to pacify the fears of men by indicating causes, or by alleging an explanation of the events. The reader will remark that one of the four living creatures hands the bowls to the angels, and that the bowls, even as the girdles of the angels, are golden. The living creatures, symbols of the attributes of God as displayed in creation, are always connected with God's throne, and with His throne in its judicial aspect, in its relation to God's government of the earth. It is therefore in harmony with the action proceeding, judicial wrath in government, that one of these living creatures should be the intermediary between God and the angels. The

golden bowls or vials tell again of God's righteousness, what is suited to His own nature which He is about to vindicate in judgment. (Compare Romans i. 16–18.)

The vials being given to the angel, another thing is recorded. "*And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and no man* [no one] *was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.*" (*v.* 8.) The glory of God is the display of what He is. Any putting forth therefore of what God is, whether in grace, in power, or in holiness, is a display of His glory. Here accordingly, as power in judgment is in question, it is the display of what He is judicially according to the requirements of His own nature. (Compare Isaiah vi. 1–4, also 2 Chron. vii. 1, 2.) This at once explains why, until these judgments were completed, no one could enter the temple; for who indeed could stand before a God of judgment?

While one of the living creatures is employed to give the vials to the angels, the command for action proceeds out of the temple itself: "*And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.*" (Chap. xvi. 1.) The attitude of the seven angels is to be remarked as a pattern of all true service. It is an attitude of perfect obedience. They come out from the presence of God, they receive the instruments of their service from one of the living creatures, and finally they do not move a step until they have a divine command; they "do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word."

Upon the vials themselves but few remarks will be necessary, because of their remarkable similarity to the seven trumpets. We shall therefore content ourselves

with calling attention to the points of agreement and difference, and to their general significance. First of all it should be noted, that, inasmuch as the seventh trumpet reaches down to the close, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom, the seven vials must, if comprised within a shorter period, be in part contemporaneous with the seven trumpets. If they begin after the commencement of the trumpets, they must still terminate at the same time. Secondly, there is no mention in the vial-judgments, as in the case of the trumpets, of a "third part" being specially affected. That is to say, the effects of God's judicial dealing are not confined, as in the trumpets, to the Roman earth, but are more general in their character. Thirdly, the first four vial-plagues "have the same object as the judgments of the first four trumpets—the whole circle of symbolic nature, but here directly as regards men, earth, sea, rivers, and sun." The fifth and sixth vials correspond with the fifth and sixth trumpets: both alike affect the kingdom of the beast and the Euphrates, while the last two in each series bring us to the close of God's dealings with the earth preparatory to the introduction of the kingdom of Christ.

Attention to the above comparison and contrast will aid in seizing the general meaning of these last seven plagues. The first vial is poured out upon "*the earth,*" the scene of ordered government: "*And there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.*" (*v.* 2.) Satan may delude men and seduce them into apostasy, and into the acceptance of the beast and antichrist, but God will once more make it known, by causing His hand to fall upon His enemies, as in Egypt in days of old, that

He will not suffer His glory to be given to another. The next vial is poured out "*upon the sea*," the sea representing the masses of the peoples, "viewed as unorganized"; "*and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.*" (*v.* 3.) It may be difficult to state precisely what is intended here; but plainly some deathful influence goes forth in this plague among the peoples of the earth, resulting in general moral death. The third is somewhat similar, only the plague falls upon "*the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.*" (*v.* 4.) If rivers and fountains represent moral principles, which, in their course, should be the sources of life and refreshment to men, this will portend the corruption of these, the surrender of all such, so that what is offered in their stead becomes the means of death rather than life. It is so in this day, for example, when rationalism and infidelity flow out through the nation in the place of the word of God.

This plague evokes from "*the angel of the waters*" the cry, "*Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be,* because Thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.*" (*vv.* 5, 6.) On the ground of righteousness this principle is evident. Men had put to death God's witnesses, rejected His word, and now they have judicially to "drink" that which causes death. So, for example, the Jews shed the blood of Stephen and others, and they, in this case of their own will, "drank," in their blind hate against God and His truth, that which brought in spiritual death upon their souls. To the cry of the angel of the waters, "*another*

* Another reading gives, omitting "O Lord," "Thou art righteous, who art and wast, the Holy One."

out of the altar" is heard to respond, "*Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.*" (v. 7.)

The fourth and fifth vials are easily comprehended. The fourth "*poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him* [it] *to scorch men with fire.*" (*v.* 8.) The sun, it will be recollected, is the emblem of supreme authority; and this plague therefore points to some tyrannical exercise of it, some fearful despotism which causes immense trial and suffering to those trodden down under its heel. But so far from humbling themselves before God, while groaning under sufferings, men blaspheme His name, for in spite of their wickedness they will be made to recognize that He "*hath power over these plagues.*" Yet, such is the hardness of man's heart, "*they repented not, to give Him glory.*" (*v.* 9.)

"*The fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat* [throne] *of the beast*"; and, again like Egypt of old, "*his kingdom was full of darkness,*" only this, we apprehend, would be moral in its character rather than actual. The consequence was what is really a foretaste of hell; for in the intensity of their distress and misery they "*gnawed their tongues . . . and blasphemed the God of heaven,*" to whom they also attribute "*their pains and their sores.*" But they "*repented not of their deeds.*" (*vv.* 10, 11.) The reader cannot fail to be struck with the solemn repetition of the impenitence of those who are suffering under the judicial hand of God. They had despised and killed His witnesses, and now, though they cannot any longer conceal from themselves that there is a God who judges the earth, they refuse to acknowledge their sin. They "repented not"; their evil hearts still clung to the very deeds which had brought upon them their terrible sufferings. What a proof of the incurable evil of human nature, that every

imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually!

The sixth angel "*poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared.*" (*v.* 12.) The Euphrates, a river well known in Scripture, was, and, as is plain from this scripture, will be, the eastern boundary of the Roman empire. What is here symbolically described therefore as the drying up of its water, will mean that this boundary is broken through, and can no longer be maintained.* Whatever the human instrumentality by which the removal of this boundary is effected, it is the consequence of the pouring out of the angelic vial. It is a "plague" from the hand of God through His providential agents. In connection with this, "*three unclean spirits like frogs*" proceed from the trinity of evil, "*out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet,*" and act upon "*the kings of the whole habitable world.*" † (*vv.* 13, 14.) Just as Ahab was persuaded by "a lying spirit" in the mouth of his prophets to go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle to his own destruction, so these "*spirits of demons, working miracles*" (*v.* 14), will influence these kings to combine with one consent with their allies for their objects, all ignorant of the fact that they are being gathered for the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Jerusalem, as we may learn from the prophets, will be the point to which they will converge (see Isaiah lxvi.; Zech. xii.–xiv.; with Rev. xix. 11–21); and Jerusalem will be the object

* Whether these kings of the East come at first in antagonism to the "beast" cannot be known. In the issue, it is certain they are his confederates.

† So it should read, and not, as in the English Version, "the kings of the earth and of the whole world."

of their attack. At first victory will seem to be theirs; but just as their prey is about to be devoured, the Lord Himself will appear, and, rescuing His people, will "destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." (Zech. xii.)

That this is the event indicated is seen from verse 15. After the description of the action of the three spirits of demons there is a solemn pause, and the Lord Himself speaks: "*Behold, I come as a thief.*" This is the known way in Scripture of His coming to the world; that is, of His appearing. (See 1 Thess. v. 1–4; 2 Peter iii. 10; Rev. iii. 3, &c.) This makes it very clear that the battle of that great day of Almighty God is that consequent upon the sudden appearing of Christ in His glory as described in the scriptures above given. It is because He will come thus as a thief that He adds, "*Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*" (*v.* 15, compare Matt. xxiv. 36, 37.) This instruction, as well as warning, applies above all to the elect remnant of that day.

One more particular is now added—the name of the place to which the kings and their armies will be gathered. It is called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.* This name has a symbolical import, and means, in fact, the hill of Megiddo. Megiddo was the great battle-field of Barak (Judges v. 19), and had, therefore, combined with other events in connection with the same place,† a peculiar significance in Jewish history. This will account for its application to that awful place where "the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies" will gather "together

* Some read, Harmagedon.

† See, for example, 2 Chronicles xxxv. 20–27, where one of the saddest events, as affecting the Jewish people, is recorded.

to make war against Him that sat on the horse" (the Lord in His glory) "and against His army." (Rev. xix. 19.)

The consummation is now reached. Together with the pouring out of the seventh vial "*into the air, . . . there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.*" (*v.* 17.) God's preliminary judgments are now completed; and the next thing to follow, not described here, will be the event announced in verse 15, the coming of the Lord as a thief. The effects of this last plague are briefly given. The great city, Rome (chap. xvii. 18), "the unified association of European civilization," for it is the expression of all that the Roman Empire is in its wealth, art, literature, and commerce (see chap. xviii.) is "*divided into three parts.*" (*v.* 19.) Babylon is judged, the details of which are found in chap. xviii.; "*and every island fled away, and the mountains were not found*" (*v.* 20); all the world's stability and order are utterly subverted, and reduced to chaotic confusion; and finally, God's violent judgments (see Isaiah xxxii. 19) will once again descend on men, who, still untouched by His repeated scourges, will in their madness respond with blasphemy "*because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.*" (*v.* 21.)

CHAPTER XVII.

AT the close of the previous chapter, in connection with the last vial, we are told that "great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." And now, before the specific details of her judgment are described (chap. xviii.), her moral character and her connection with the civil power are portrayed, and portrayed with such distinctness that her identification is easy, beyond even the possibility of mistake, for those who are not blinded by prejudice and preconceived ideas, and who are subject to the word of God.

"*And there came,*" says John, "*one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.*" (*vv.* 1, 2.) Then, from verse 3 to verse 6 we have in detail what John saw when he was carried away by the angel "*in the spirit into the wilderness.*" (*v.* 3.) Next, from verse 6 to the end of the chapter the angel's own interpretation of the vision is recorded, as given to John.

First of all, we may occupy ourselves with the two-fold description of Babylon as the "great whore" or harlot, and as the "woman." In chapter xxi. 9 it is also one of

the seven angels which had the seven vials, etc., who says to John, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's *wife*." The designed contrast is too evident to escape notice, and at once reveals the significance of the expression, "the great whore." We learn thus, beyond all doubt, that what claimed to be the bride of Christ was morally, according to the unerring estimate of God, a great harlot. The second verse of our chapter explains this —the manner of her "fornication" with the kings of the earth, and further adds that she had intoxicated the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her special sin. The church of God, the bride, the Lamb's wife, is heavenly in origin, character, and hopes; but that which usurped this title became wholly earthly, became a power amidst the powers of the world, made alliances with them, or reduced them to subjection, and thereby she corrupted herself and those with whom she entered into unholy association. Thereby, too, she blinded and deceived the inhabitants of the earth with her intoxicating wine, allowing them, under the sanction of her assumed authority, the gratification of every lust of the flesh. Corrupted herself, she corrupted the word of God, and became the corruptress of all with whom she came into contact.

She is, moreover, presented as a "*woman*"; and the angel expressly says that the woman is "*that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*" (*v.* 18.) The church, as we have seen, is the bride, the Lamb's wife; but what John saw, when the angel thus described her, was "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." (Chap. xxi. 10.) This affords another contrast. The church is a heavenly, and the "woman" is an earthly city. In both of these characters therefore Babylon counterfeits the heavenly Jerusalem. This will help us to

understand the significance of the "woman." She is a system, the expression of a system, a centre that gathers up and presents all her principles in an organized form. We are acquainted with this symbolism even in our ordinary speech. We say, for example, that a person has "gone over to Rome," meaning that he has joined the papal "church."

Before proceeding further, it will clear our way if we seek to answer definitely the question as to what system is indicated under the figure of the woman. In addition to what has been said, which in itself is sufficient to supply the answer, three things, named in the chapter, may be considered. In verse 9 we read, "*Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads*" (alluding to the beast) "*are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*" It would be a waste of time to show, what has been indisputably proved a thousand times, that Rome was ever known as the seven-hilled city. There could not, in fact, have been a more direct explanation given that Rome is the city intended.* Again, in verse 15, it is said, "*The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*" The significant change should be remarked from the term "woman" in verse 9 to the "whore" here used. When it is a question of locality, identified with the system, "woman" is employed; but seen in connection with the various races and divisions of people that own her debasing sway, we have "harlot," to give prominence to her corrupting character. If, then, the city of Rome is plainly intended in verse 9, here it is

* If it be objected that the mountains represent the symbolic force of the seven heads of the beast, seven forms of governmental power, the answer is, that the two things coincide, inasmuch as Rome was and will be the seat of government.

the fact of her almost universal dominion to which our attention is called. Lastly, in verse 18, it is said that the "woman" is no other than that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth. Every student of history is acquainted with the fact that this is exactly what Rome did in the middle ages. Claiming to be Christ's vicegerents on earth, the popes always avowed their title to sovereignty over the kingdoms of the world; and even now, though to a large extent the nations have revolted against their arrogant demands, the claim is still asserted. Combining therefore these several features, so strikingly set forth in this chapter, only one conclusion is possible, viz., that we have here a vision of papal Rome. But the reader will remember that the time is yet future when she will entirely correspond with the portraiture of this chapter; not forgetting, at the same time, that the moral character of Rome has been the same in all ages.*

We may now pursue, with more intelligence, the consideration of details. It should be first remarked that the "wilderness" is the scene of the vision, a moral desert, where, to borrow language, no springs of God are found; and this wilderness is to be regarded as the result of the

* It may assist the reader if the above contrast is presented in a still more distinct form. The church is seen, in the last chapters of this book, as the bride of Christ, and as a city, the holy city, new Jerusalem. Babylon, as Satan's master counterfeit, or imitation, is also a city, and claims to be a bride. As the latter, she is the expression of a religious system, and is here termed a harlot, "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." Such is her moral character in the sight of God. As a city, Babylon is the seat of administration in government, as we read in verse 9: "The seven heads" (of the beast, verse 3) "are seven mountains" (a description as explained in the text which plainly points to Rome), "on which the woman sitteth." Satan's last effort to deceive the eyes and hearts of men, before the appearing of Christ, will thus be in the formation of Babylon, as an imitation of God's city, new Jerusalem. But here in this chapter his devices are exposed for all who have eyes to see, and ears to hear.

influence of the woman and of the beast. It is in such a place that John "*saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.*" (*v.* 3.) The beast we already know from chapter xiii. 1, and the reader can refer back to our remarks there; but we may once again call attention to the plain description here given by the angel: "*The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*" (*v.* 8.) The Roman empire was in full vigour in the apostle's day, the empire that was shadowed out by Daniel's fourth beast (chap. vii. 7), and which is to be found in existence at the coming of the Ancient of Days. (*v.* 22.) At the present moment this empire "is not"; and we learn from our chapter that it will, and must to fulfil the prediction of Daniel, reappear. But it will reappear as devilish in its orgin, it will ascend out of the bottomless pit, and it will be blasphemous in its character. (*v.* 3.) Still more precise information is given. The beast has seven heads — forms of power, represented in verse 10 as kings, of whom five had fallen in the apostles' days. One was then existing, "*the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.*" (*vv.* 10, 11.) If Napoleon I. is, as has often been suggested, the one who was to make the seventh, there remains now only the appearance of the "beast" to fulfil the angelic prophecy.*

* The five forms of governmental power that had passed away would seem to have been: kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes. The Cæsars were then existing. This would leave, as pointed out above, Napoleon, and the beast of chapter xiii.

Such then is the last awful form of governmental power, embodied in the revived Roman empire, which will fill the minds of all, outside of the elect saints of God, with amazement and admiration. What greater proof could be given of what man is than the fact that his ideal of government will be satanic?

Before pursuing other features of the "beast," we return now to the "woman" and her relation to it. In verse 3 she is here seen "sitting upon" the beast; that is, what the woman represents, Popery in its full-blown development after the rapture of the saints, is allied with and upheld by the world-power. She is borne up and carried along by all the power of the resuscitated Roman empire. This is the principle of all State "churches," only here it is exemplified in its grossest form because of the character of the "woman." First, her dress is specified: "*And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.*" (*v.* 4.) What a contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife! To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white (chap. xix. 8); but this usurper is clad in all the gorgeous beauty of earthly splendour, in the two colours that betoken worldly and imperial glory, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, all of which had their symbolic place in Judaism, in that which since the cross is divinely described as the elements of the world, or "beggarly elements," and which therefore in themselves contain the absolute denial of the church's heavenly origin and character. She has, moreover, a golden cup in her hand, full of the abominations wherewith she seduces and corrupts the nations of the earth.

Then we read: "*And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.*" (*v.* 5.) By "mystery" we understand that this had not been revealed before, and that it was something which could not have been understood but for this divine explanation. "Babylon the great" sets forth her corrupting character. In the Old Testament the symbolical significance of Babylon is "corruption in the activity of power," and that activity of power which brought the people of God into bondage, as the consequence of their sins. What we learn here, therefore, is that the professing church on earth, rejected as Laodicea, refused as Christ's light-bearer in the world, will finally concentrate within herself, and in a more intense form, all the evils that marked Babylon of old; and hence it is that she is termed Babylon the great. This wicked "woman" is also a mother, a mother of other systems, as false to Christ as herself. It is thus not only Popery, but all other systems that derive their parentage from her and partake of her character. Are there not such already in existence? "Abominations" also are produced by her. Now, "abominations" is a well-known scriptural word for "idols"; and consequently Rome is a parent of idolatry. Who does not know the fact? And yet people are so willingly blinded as to listen to her protestations of innocence of the charge, and to accept her embrace.*

Lastly, the most heinous charge of all is preferred: "*And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*" (*v.* 6.) What

* It should be remembered that the name written on the forehead of the "woman" will be only spiritually discerned. Externally she will present everything that is attractive to man as man.

Jerusalem became in a past age (see Matt. xxiii. 34, 35), Rome is in the present dispensation. She has ever been and will ever maintain the character of the great persecutress of the saints of God. There is not a land, where she has gained a footing, which she has not defiled with the blood of God's elect. Like Manasseh of old, who "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another," she has hunted, persecuted, burnt or killed the witnesses of Christ in every quarter of the globe. Black Bartholomews, murdered Albigenses and Waldenses, mark her progress at every step, and will continue to do so, for "she will not repent" until the consummation of our chapter is reached.

It is in answer to the astonishment of the apostle that the angel proceeds to expound "*the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.*" (*v.* 7.) Of the woman we have spoken, as also of the "beast" in its main characteristics. We now proceed to the further development in connection with the ten horns: "*And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.*" (*v.* 12.) Those who have read with any intelligence Daniel's interpretation of the image Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream (chap. ii. 36–45), and his own vision of the fourth beast, together with the angelic explanation given to him (chap. vii.), will be prepared to understand the meaning of the ten horns or kings of this chapter. It is very plain, from the combination of these several scriptures, that the final form of the restored western Roman Empire will be ten kingdoms, all of which will be confederate under an imperial head—the beast. The angel, speaking of the sovereigns of these kingdoms, says they receive power as kings one hour

with the beast; and he then adds, "*These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.*" (*v.* 13.) For the moment these ten kingdoms will be unanimous, holding out to deluded man the prospect of halcyon days of peace and prosperity in accepting the leadership of the beast, who will thus seem to be resistless and invincible. Hence the introduction here—leaping over the interval, however brief, of other events—of the statement that he with his allies in their mad self-confidence and daring impiety will "*make war with the Lamb,*" only, as we know it must be, to meet with complete and utter destruction. The full account of this is in chapter xix., and we reserve any further remarks therefore till this portion is reached.

Coming now to verse 16, we find a change: "*And the ten horns which thou sawest upon* the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.*" (*vv.* 16, 17.) It would seem from this statement as if the change in the attitude of the imperial power towards the harlot is simultaneous with or consequent upon the federation of the ten kingdoms under the Roman head. Whether so or not, the ten kings and the beast turn round from being the supporters of Rome, and, becoming her enemies they confiscate her possessions, strip her of her gorgeous raiment, and utterly destroy her very existence. If we recall chapter xiii., the motive for this action may be gathered. Together with the advent of the antichrist, the "beast" is elevated into the supreme object of worship, and thus the "woman," false as she has been to Christ since

* The word *and* should be substituted for "upon," as being the correct reading.

she will still traffic with His name, will no longer be tolerated. But in taking vengeance upon her, these potentates all unknown to themselves are the blind executors of God's will. Satan united the powers of the world against Christ, and Satan gives the beast his power, his throne, and great authority, and now we behold Satan himself, in his rage against God and His Christ, accomplishing God's purpose in the extinction of the "harlot."

The chapter concludes, as before pointed out, with an identification of the woman, which admits of no mistake; for there has never been a religious system on the earth, save Rome, which could be said to reign over the kings of the earth.

CHAPTERS XVIII. XIX. 1–4.

ANOTHER vision opens out now before the mind of the apostle. In the preceding chapter the judgment of the great harlot was announced, and the instruments of its execution are revealed; whereas now we are permitted to see the disappearance of wicked Babylon, and the effects upon the various classes of the empire who had been in relation with her. But, as has been more than once pointed out in these Apocalyptic visions, the result is anticipatively proclaimed. John thus writes: "*And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*" (*vv.* 1, 2.) Twice before the judgment of Babylon had been mentioned (chap. xiv. 8; xvi. 19), and now the providential governmental instrument, the angel, descends to earth for its accomplishment, working, however, as we have learned from the previous chapter, through human agents, the beast and his vassal kings. But it is rather the accomplishment announced by the angel, revealing, at the same time, what Babylon, that which once bore the name of Christ, has become—the dwelling-place of demons, and the prison of unclean spirits, and of every form of Satan's power.* The grounds, or one ground (see chapter xix. 2),

* The reader may compare Isaiah xxi. 9; Jeremiah l. 39; li. 8, 37, as to the destruction of the historical Babylon.

of her judgment is stated. Balaam had taught Balak how to seduce the children of Israel to eat things offered to idols, and to commit fornication. (Rev. ii. 14.) Jezebel in Thyatira followed in his steps (ii. 20); but Babylon seduced the nations and the kings of the earth with the golden cup of her abominations and her fornication.* (Chap. xvii. 4.) She, moreover, who had professed to belong to Him, who when here had not where to lay His head, made the merchants of the earth "*rich through the abundance of her delicacies.*" (*v.* 3.) Not only therefore had she become false to Christ, but she was the practical denial of all that He was and is, and, in fact, utterly apostate, completely ruled as she was by the god of this world.

Another voice is now heard "*from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*" (*vv.* 4, 5.) This appeal to the people of God has occasioned considerable difficulty, inasmuch as on the surface it leads to the supposition that saints might still be found in Babylon. It must be remembered then, in the first place, that Babylon represents a spiritual system, and that this system, in its main moral features, has been in existence ever since the days of John. Thyatira and Laodicea, in fact, contained the root of all the evils which are afterwards seen fully developed in Babylon. *The instruction therefore is for all ages,* calling upon God's people to come out, and to be separate from that which can be spiritually discerned as Babylon, in which, as in Ezra's and Nehemiah's days, so many saints are enslaved. (Comp. Jer. l. 8; li. 6–9.) And they are also reminded that,

* The reader may instructively compare Ezekiel xvi. 15–34.

if they continue to be mixed up with such a system, they will become partakers of her sins, and be governmentally subject to her plagues. Was there ever a day since these words were written when this solemn, urgent call needed to be more persistently sounded out through the length and breadth of Christendom than now? For what do we behold? Babylon plainly manifesting herself, and boldly rearing her head with her arrogant claims, as well as insinuating herself into popular favour and acceptance by her subtleties and flatteries. Let God's people therefore everywhere be obedient to this heavenly voice, and come out of her; for her sins are fast reaching up unto heaven, and the cup of her iniquities is already nearly full.

The question still returns, Is there no application to the eve of Babylon's destruction? That there can be no Christians in Babylon, at this period, is seen from the fact that the church is already in heaven. There will be Jewish saints on the earth, and, as chapter vii. teaches, also Gentile believers, who will have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; but we have no information as to whether any of these, wearied out with their persecutions, may be tempted to seek shelter within the precincts of Babylon. If so, the call would be also addressed to such; yet the main significance of the cry is to all who may have become at any time mixed up with the principles that will finally concentrate and express themselves in Babylon.

The following verses need careful attention. The voice continues: "*Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen,*

and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." (*vv.* 6, 7.) The question is, To whom are these words addressed? It would seem to be a continuation of the address to God's people commenced in verse 4; but this is scarcely possible on two grounds; first, because the saints are not the executors of judgment upon Babylon; and, secondly, because we know that the beast and the kings, the ten horns, are the appointed instruments for this purpose. This has led some to suppose that the address is to the latter. This, however, would scarcely be in accord with what is found in this book; and consequently we regard these verses more in the light of an annunciation of the judgment, and the principle upon which it will be executed, than as a summons to those chosen to be the vessels of God's vengeance. The principle of the judgment is a known one in Scripture. God dealt in the same way even with Jerusalem (Isaiah xl. 2); and in Babylon being "rewarded" as she had "rewarded" God's people, we have a direct reminiscence of the manner of the judgment upon Babylon of old. (See Psalm cxxxvii. 8, 9; Jer. l. 15–29.)

Then, after the principle of the judgment is explained, we have a striking presentation of the moral character of Babylon. She had "glorified herself, and lived deliciously." What a revelation! And what an unfolding of her utter apostasy! Self-exaltation, the perfect antithesis to the life of our blessed Lord, had been her sole object! And, moreover, her "life" expended itself in her own gratifications. Morally she was in the desert, and yet she deceived herself into the belief that it was a paradise, and lived deliciously. Even more than this; "for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." This language corresponds, almost exactly, with that used by Isaiah, when denouncing judgment upon the

"daughter of Babylon" (chap. xlvii.); and it teaches us therefore that the mystic Babylon of the future is the moral descendant of the city of Nebuchadnezzar, embodying the same moral features, and drawing down from heaven the same vengeance. A still more striking thing to be observed is, that Laodicea's boast, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," is the moral root of all the evil here portrayed as existing in Babylon. While, however, man in his vain self-confidence may shut God out, seek his happiness in his own resources, and vaunt himself upon his own acquisitions and their stability, the time will come, as in the case before us, when God will interpose and exact a strict account according to the standard of His own holy requirements. Hence it is, as following upon the statement of Babylon's pride, self-glorification, and self-sufficiency, that it is said, "*Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.*" (*v.* 8.) It is the beast and his horns (chap. xvii. 16) who are the seen executors of the judgment, but they are but the blind servants of the will of God.

In the next place, down to verse 18, a description is given of the effect upon various classes of the destruction of Babylon. It will suffice to specify one or two features of the picture. It will be noted, first of all, that the kings of the earth, those who had committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her, are loud in their lamentations over the destruction of "that great city Babylon." This is by no means inconsistent with the fact that they, or some of them, had united with the beast to despoil her of her possessions. Many a gigantic abuse has often been judged in great popular movements, or even by peaceful

legislation, and yet the framework of society has been shattered by its removal. Babylon, with its wide-spreading roots, will have interlaced itself with almost every social fibre of the life of the nations; and her fall, therefore, will spread universal dismay and confusion as well as render human governments unstable and powerless. This will account for the wail of these kings, as they stand "*afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*" (*v.* 10.) The other mourners over Babylon's fall are commercial, "*the merchants of the earth*" (*v.* 11), those who had been "*made rich by her*" (*v.* 15) in their traffic in all the various articles, for which the demand had been created or stimulated by Babylon's needs and influence; and "*every ship-master, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea*" (*v.* 17); for all that had ships in the sea had also been made rich "*by reason of her costliness.*" (*v.* 19.)

All this description, it will be at once understood, is symbolical, the import of which is that the whole commercial system of the empire is utterly deranged, if not destroyed, by the judgment upon Babylon. The blow that falls upon her destroys with her the prosperity of the habitable world; and hence the universal sorrow; for men are ever ready to bewail the loss of the means of their comforts, wealth, and affluence.*

There is ever an utter contrariety between God's thoughts and man's. All classes of the people sorrow over Babylon's fall; and now we are permitted, in contrast

* A striking example of this is seen in the fact that, after the healing of the demoniac, and the consequent destruction of the swine, the Gadarenes prayed the Lord Jesus to depart out of their coasts. They preferred to have the demoniac, and their swine, to the presence of Jesus, because He had interfered with their earthly possessions.

with this, to hear the estimate in heaven of this event. "*Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*"* (*v.* 20.) What thus causes universal sorrow and widespread dismay on earth is the occasion of joy to heaven, and to those who had been witnesses for Christ, and some of these martyrs for His name's sake (*v.* 24), on earth.

We have thereon a symbolic action to describe Babylon's destruction. "*And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.*" (*v.* 21.) So was it with ancient Babylon. Jeremiah "wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon," and he directed Seraiah, who accompanied Zedekiah to Babylon in the fourth year of the latter's reign, after he should have read the book in the very presence of Babylon's prosperity and magnificence, to bind a stone to it, and to cast it into the midst of Euphrates; and as he did so, he was to say, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her." (Jer. li. 60–64.) The meaning of the action is the same, therefore, in both cases; it betokened violent, complete, final, and irreversible destruction. Never more was either to rise again; and thus we have in our chapter the solemn declaration that henceforth all strains of music, all mechanical activities, the sound of millstones, should be for ever silenced, that nevermore should shine within her the light of a candle, or be heard the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride. The desolation was to be complete; "*for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of*

* Literally it is, "For God hath judged your judgment upon her."

prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." (*vv.* 23, 24.) Combining the several grounds of Babylon's judgment it will be seen that they are four—"idolatry, corruption, worldliness, and persecution." God had borne long with this wicked system which had profaned His name, and falsified His truth; but now His mighty hand has descended upon it, taking vengeance for all the iniquities which had filled the earth with defilement and corruption.

The first four verses of chapter xix. give the celebration in heaven of the destruction of Babylon. John "*heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.*" (*vv.* 1–3.) It is an interesting question as to who are these that, with "a great voice," raise this song of praise. They are a class, evidently, outside of the twenty-four elders, and they are as clearly not angels. The inference is, therefore, that they are those who had been martyred on earth after the church had been removed, called up on high. The ground of their celebration of Jehovah-Elohim, their God, is the character of His judgments—they are "true and righteous," as displayed in the destruction of the great corruptress of the earth, and in avenging the blood of His servants at her hand. They repeat, in the intensity of their joy, their Alleluia.* Then the solemn statement, in contrast

* This means in its Hebrew form, Hallelujah, Praise ye Jehovah, or Jah. The last five Psalms commence and end with this word, this note of praise.

with this burst of joy in heaven, is given, as significant of the everlasting judgment that has fallen upon the harlot: "And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." (Compare Jude 7.)

Following upon this, the four-and-twenty-elders (seen as the twenty-four elders here for the last time), and the four living creatures, who had been the spectators of the joy of the "much people," themselves "*fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.*" (*v.* 4.) The mind of heaven is one, both in praising God, and in rejoicing over the vengeance that has overtaken Babylon; and that mind, while in full communion with, indeed the expression of, the mind of God, is, let it be repeated, in direct opposition to the mind of man. God and all heaven rejoice over that which man esteems as his greatest calamity. What an exposition of the alienation of men "from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB.

(*vv.* 5–10.)

IN this section the marriage of the Lamb, the event for which He had so long waited, now takes place. To possess the pearl of great price, He "went and sold all that He had, and bought it"; but although He loved the church, and gave Himself for it, and even though He had the church in heaven with Himself, He waits in patience for the presentation of His bride, until Babylon, the harlot, the false bride, should have been judged and utterly destroyed. The marriage of the Lamb does not then take place for some little time after the church has been caught up to be with the Lord. (1 Thess. iv.)

It would seem that verse 5, while following upon, and, it may be, connected with the worship of the elders and the four living creatures, is really introductory to the universal joy of heaven consequent upon the marriage of the Lamb. The "*voice came out of the throne*," and this shows us that the event about to be celebrated is associated with God's ways in government, that is, as presented in this book. It must be remembered, indeed, that both the judgment visited upon Babylon, and the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, are preparatory to the appearing of Christ with His saints, to make good His title on earth, both as against evil and in taking possession of His kingdom. Having made good all that God is, borne the whole weight of His glory on the cross, He is in this scene

about to vindicate also His name in government on the earth. The command that issues from the throne is, "*Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great.*" It is a "voice" that gives the command; whose voice is not said; but it is charged with the authority of the throne, and the speaker, inasmuch as he uses the words "our God," associates himself with those addressed. (Compare verse 10.) The character, moreover, in which those called to worship are viewed, is noteworthy. They are simply "His servants, and ye that fear Him," terms therefore which would include all the saints of all dispensations, as well as perhaps all the angelic host. There will not be one among all the multitudes of heaven that is not embraced under these appellations. (Compare Psalms ciii. 20–22; cxviii. 1–4.)

The response is as instant as it is overpowering in its grandeur: "*And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.*" (*vv.* 6, 7.) There are two grounds given for the praise rendered. The first is, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, showing that the kingdom is regarded as already established. In fact, God has only waited for the vindication of His name, and for making good His power in government, until He had set aside for ever in judgment the great harlot who had corrupted the earth. Thereon, after the marriage of the Lamb, the heavens would open for the issuing forth of Christ to put down all the rule and authority wherewith the beast and the false prophet had deceived the habitable world, and to establish His own sovereignty over the

nations of the earth. The names under which God is here celebrated are remarkable; they comprise the several characters in which He was revealed to the saints of old, viz., Jehovah, the self-existent One, the One who is, and was, and is to come, the name in which He was pleased to reveal Himself in relationship with Israel; God, the expression of all that He is in His own being, viewed absolutely, the One with whom man has to do as a responsible creature; and, finally, Almighty, or Omnipotent, answering to Shaddai in the Old Testament. (See Genesis xvii. 1; Exodus vi. 3, and compare 2 Cor. vi. 18.) The reason for the introduction of these names, the names of the One whom Christians know as their God and Father, is found in the fact that He is here brought before us in relation to the kingdom and to the earth. The "reigning," which is here celebrated, is connected with His kingdom in display on earth, not in heaven, and hence with the overthrow of all and everything that had exalted themselves against Him and His Christ. It is, in fact, the substitution in this world of God's power for that of man's, and consequently the introduction of the era of righteousness, peace, and blessing.

The second ground of heaven's joy is the arrival of the time for the marriage of the Lamb, His wife having made herself ready. As before noted, this event does not take place until after the false bride has been judged; and now we also learn, that in heaven there was a necessary preparation for the marriage: the wife must "make herself" ready. The character of this "readiness" is seen in the following verse, where we read, "*And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness* [or, righteousnesses] *of saints.*" (*v.* 8.) This will help us to determine the

meaning of "making herself ready," as well as to fix precisely the time of the marriage. It must be observed, first of all, that the righteousnesses are those of the saints, and not what we know as God's righteousness according to the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans. (See also 2 Cor. v. 21.) We read in 2 Cor. v. of the judgment-seat of Christ, before which we must be all manifested, when every one will "receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" Whatever good any of His people have done, although it was by the Spirit and through His grace that it had been accomplished, will then, in the same grace, be imputed to the vessel which He had deigned to employ for the purpose, while every work of the flesh, whatever its outward appearance, will be traced back to its root, and its real nature exposed. And we shall thus learn of the grace that had borne with us in our failures as much as in using us in His service, and in reckoning to us what He had given us to do. But we are now concerned only with the latter: and we see then from this scripture, that all the good put to our account, when we are manifested before the tribunal of Christ, will constitute, not God's righteousness which in Christ we have already become, but, our righteousness, and it is these righteousnesses which are here symbolized by fine linen, clean and white. Not only therefore will the bride be beautified with God's own beauty, His righteousness, but she will also be robed in what He is pleased to call her own righteousnesses, and it is as so arrayed that she is here seen as ready for the marriage, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband": made meet, but only through unspeakable grace, to be the companion of Christ throughout eternity.

Moreover, this, as has been said, fixes the time of the

marriage. When the Lord descends from heaven with a shout, etc., it is to receive His people unto Himself. The dead saints raised, and the living changed, all will be caught up together to meet Him in the air, and we shall then be for ever with the Lord. His first act will be to introduce us into the Father's house. (John xiv.) Beyond this we have no revelation until we come to the judgment-seat of Christ, which would seem, from what takes place in heaven in this scripture, to immediately precede the marriage. Consequently the Lord, who had long since espoused His bride, does not take her in marriage until upon the eve of the appearing.

The question still remains as to the significance of the marriage. To understand this we must borrow the light of another scripture. In Ephesians v. we read, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (*vv.* 25–27.) This scripture travels far beyond our immediate subject, showing us, as it does, how Christ, in His surpassing love and grace, and at what a cost, possessed Himself of His bride; how that, in the same love, He cared for, and prepared her for her destination, making her worthy of the place into which His love was calling her, and bestowing upon her the moral fitness to enjoy His companionship and affection. The marriage itself is contained in her presentation to Himself, and it is this presentation which is signalized in heaven in our chapter.* Two things in connection with this should be

* It should rather be said, perhaps, that the presentation of the church to Christ is preparatory to the celebration of the marriage, that the latter is the public announcement of the private presentation.

noted; first, that it is the heavenly bride, and not the earthly bride, of which our scripture speaks;* and, secondly, that the heavenly bride is composed, and composed entirely, of the saints of this dispensation; that is, of all the saints from Pentecost onward until the return of the Lord to receive His people unto Himself. The saints of other dispensations, both before Pentecost and after the Lord's coming the second time, will have their own special place of perfect blessedness, but they are not included in those who form the bride, the Lamb's wife. This fact explains another thing; that the twenty-four elders are seen here for the last time. The elders, as before stated, comprise all who share in the first resurrection (excepting those afterwards added as found in chap. xx. 4, 5); all the saints of Old Testament times, as well as the Church. Inasmuch, then, as it is only the church that has been sovereignly chosen to be the bride of Christ, the elders disappear since they could no longer be representative of all the saved. The church from this moment is apart, taken apart, to enter into her special relationship with Him who had purchased, redeemed, and fitted her to be the sharer of His exaltation, His affections, and His joys throughout eternity.

In the next verse, the two classes of the redeemed, all those who had hitherto in this book been represented by the twenty-four elders, are clearly distinguished: "*And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*" (*v.* 9.) Here, then, we have the Lamb, the Lamb's wife already specified, and those who are invited to the wedding feast; the last class being all those outside of the church, who had been

* The earthly bride is Jerusalem, but Jerusalem as the expression of Israel; and this is the bride of the Song of Solomon.

exhibited under the symbol of the elders. Even in regard to the earthly bride, the same distinction is made. When the disciples of John were somewhat jealous for the reputation of their master, he said, "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." (John iii. 28, 29.) All these, therefore, who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, are, like John, friends of the Bridegroom, and, while not in the intimacy of the bride, will have their own special portion, and will rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice.

It is to be observed that, while the fact of the marriage is stated, and the wife is seen as made ready, also the guests as invited, the joys of the feast are not exhibited. The reason is that no one could be permitted to enter into that which must for ever remain a blessed secret between the Bridegroom and the Bride. The Bride, later on, shall be shown out in all her magnificent beauty, "having the glory of God," but no stranger could "intermeddle" with the joy of the Lamb's union with His wife. But its significance and importance in the counsels of God may be gathered from the universal joy it occasions in heaven, and from the place it occupies in His ways in relation to the earth.

And what a relief, and indeed encouragement, it is, beloved reader, to turn our eyes away from all the confusion and discord presented in the spectacle of a broken and divided church on earth, to the perfection of that day when the church, now fully answering to the mind of Him who had loved her and given Himself for her,

enters upon her long-looked and waited for union* with her Lord. It is for this moment He also had been waiting for ages, and now His joy is displayed at the marriage feast, in His resting in His love, in His joying over her with singing, and in the consummation of her hopes, as well as in the fruition of her joy.

John is overwhelmed by the character of the revelations vouchsafed to him, and after the solemn affirmation of their truth in the words, "*These are the true sayings of God*," he says, "*And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" (*v.* 10.) However exalted the personage, the angel, who had been commissioned to make to John these communications, he was yet but a fellow-servant, and of all who had the testimony of Jesus; and that testimony, now that the Church was on high, was the spirit of prophecy. (Compare chapters i. 2; xii. 17.) The angel's place, therefore, equally with that of John and all other servants, was obedience to the will and word of God. Worship was due to God alone.

CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS COMING OUT OF HEAVEN.
(*vv.* 11–21.)

Until this point, from chapter iv. and onwards, we have been occupied with actings and events, whether in heaven or on earth, which take place between the rapture of the saints at the coming of the Lord, as described in 1 Thess. iv., and His public appearing in glory. The time of His

* We speak, not of union with Christ as members of His body, for that is true of the believer as soon as he is sealed with the Holy Ghost, but of the union of the bride with the Bridegroom.

patience has now ended; and heaven opens for Him to come forth in judgment, when "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." (Chap. i. 7.) It may also be remarked, as helping to understand this section of the book, that from chapter xix. 11 to chapter xxi. 8, we have a consecutive history, beginning with the appearing of Christ, and closing with the eternal scene in the new heaven and the new earth. Thereafter the Spirit of God returns, and exhibits the displayed glories of the heavenly Jerusalem during the thousand years, together with her relation to the earth during this season of millennial blessedness.

The particular aspect of the appearing of Christ is thus described: "*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.*" (*v.* 11.) This is the fourth time the opened heavens are mentioned in the New Testament. When the Lord had been baptized "the heavens were opened unto Him," and, together with the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him, there was "a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. iii. 16, 17.) Here the heavens opened upon Him, as the object on earth of God's own heart. All heaven's delight centred in the One, the lowly Man, who had identified Himself with the remnant who responded to the preaching of the Baptist, and of whom He had said in the Psalms, "In them is all my delight." God's delight was in Him, and His delight was "in the saints that are in the earth, and the excellent." (Psalm xvi.) In John i. He Himself speaks of the opened heavens, and of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man, the complete fulfilment

of which will be in the thousand years, wherein also He is heaven's object on earth. Passing to Acts vii. we read that Stephen saw the heavens opened, and Jesus, as Son of man, standing on the right hand of God. In this scene, He, who had been God's object on earth, is now the believer's object in heaven. Coming to our scripture, the heavens open for Christ to come out, surely the object of all heaven as well as the object of all His glorified saints, as He issues forth to have His enemies made His footstool.

The first thing noted is the white horse on which He sits. The symbology of the white horse has been explained in chapter vi. It signifies triumphant power, and here as there, in conflict. When Christ, therefore, issues from heaven seated on the white horse, it is the precursor of His victorious conflict with His foes, when, to use the language of the Psalm, His arrows will be sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people (peoples, it should be) fall under Him. Next, follows a description of the glorious Rider. He is called "Faithful and True." These characteristic names are familiar to the readers of this book in other connections. John terms Him "the faithful witness" (chap. i. 5); in the letter to Philadelphia He is called, "He that is holy, He that is true" (chap. iii. 7); and in that to Laodicea both terms are conjoined: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness." (Chap. iii. 14.) In Isaiah, moreover, we read that "faithfulness [shall be] the girdle of His reins." (Chap. xi. 5.) The combination of these scriptures introduces us at once into the meaning of the words. Faithfulness to God, both inward and outward, marked Him in all His earthly pathway, and when He comes forth to establish His kingdom, to make God's character good in government as against the power of evil, and the rebellion and usurpation

of man, He will be governed in all that He does by a single eye to the requirements of the glory of God, as He was also in His death on the cross. Faithfulness to Him, as already seen, will be the girdle of His loins. Truth in the inward parts, which God sought for, but never found in man until Christ came, will also distinguish Him, so that He will be the perfect expression, and thus a true witness, of all that God is as revealed in His righteous government of the earth. "Faithful and true" reveal, therefore, what He is both to God and for man when He comes forth to assume His rights in this world.

And now mark the contrast with the object of His first coming. *Then* "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn [judge] the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John iii. 17); *now* "in righteousness He doth judge and make war." Grace characterized His first appearing in this world; and righteousness, and consequently judgment, will mark the second, the period of which our scripture speaks. Every one will then be tested by the unerring standard of God's righteous requirements from man, for the day of grace will have closed, and the era of righteous government will have commenced. Christ must, therefore, then "make war" upon everything that opposes itself to, lifts itself up in rebellion against, a holy God.

We read further: "*His eyes were as* a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God.*" (*vv.* 12, 13.) It is striking to observe that His eyes are represented by the same symbol as when

* The word "as" is omitted by many editors, but whether adopted or rejected, the sense remains the same.

seen by John in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. Fire is always the emblem of judgment, and hence His eyes, being as a flame of fire, sets forth its all-searching penetrating character. The "many crowns" speak of His all-various and universal dominion, of His absolute supremacy in every circle of His headship and authority. Satan had proffered for His acceptance the power and glory of the kingdoms of the world; and, on His refusal, Satan afterwards bestowed them on his vassals and slaves, the beast and the antichrist. The true Heir waited till the time determined by His Father, and now, after His long session at the right hand of God, He comes forth, crowned with the many crowns, to take His inheritance, and to reign until His enemies be made the footstool of His feet. Concerning "the name written," concealed from all but Himself, it is the expression of the glory of His person. Whatever His dignity (and He is ever the eternal Son, whatever the relationships He may assume) He comes forth from heaven as Man; but, while this is the aspect here presented, the impenetrable character of His person abides. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father." "Name" in Scripture is the expression of what the person is as revealed—and as revealed in what He is for God. It will consequently express the secret relationship of this glorious Personage to His God and Father, into which none can penetrate, and which none can understand but Himself. The next feature, "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood," is explained for us by the prophet: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? . . . Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread

them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." (Isaiah lxiii. 1–4.) The "vesture dipped in blood" betokens, therefore, the avenging character of the judgment He is about to execute. His name is also called the Word of God. It is the Word of God that reveals God; and hence this name teaches that Christ, as thus coming forth, is the revelation of God in His righteousness in judging, and in making good His character as such in the government of, the earth. (Compare Psalms xcvi.–xcviii.)

A pause is now made in the description of Christ to introduce His followers: "*And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*" (*v.* 14.) Who are these? Two considerations will give the answer. As noticed in the earlier part of the chapter, the twenty-four elders are never seen after verse 4; and the reason is that the marriage of the Lamb immediately succeeds; and the elders on this account could no longer represent the Church.* We are told, moreover, that it was granted to the Lamb's wife to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. Now the armies that follow Christ, on white horses, significant of their association with Christ in His victorious judgment, are also clothed in fine linen; and this at once reveals that the saints who had participated

* We do not mean that Old Testament saints are not included in the representation; only if the saints of this period [the Church] are separated, the rest could no longer be exhibited in the twenty-four elders.

in the first resurrection, and who as with Christ in glory had been represented by the elders, are those who compose His armies. When Christ appears, they follow Him, and are spectators of the glories of that day.

Returning now to Christ, John says: "*And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written,* KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (*vv.* 15, 16.) In these few brief sentences the coming of Christ in judgment, the execution of God's vengeance, the establishment of His throne, the subjection of all kings and all nations to His sway, and His supreme exaltation in the earth, are all comprised. It is the complete fulfilment of the second Psalm. The sharp sword, as the reader already knows, is the word of God, according to which the nations will be judged, and with which they will be judicially smitten. "The rod of iron" expresses the absolute and inflexible character of His government, while the winepress, as the connection shows, as well as the vintage judgment of chapter xiv. speaks of the unsparing and unmitigated vengeance which will be poured out upon that awful day. It is through judgment, because of what man is, that the Lord will establish His kingdom and sovereignty over the whole earth, when He will be publicly and universally owned as "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

The next two verses are preliminary to the awful conflict which closes the chapter. An angel stands "in the sun," the place and seat, according to the symbology of the book, of supreme authority, and, crying with a loud voice, summons all the fowls that fly in the heaven to "*the*

supper of the great God." The flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, and the flesh of horses, as well as of their riders, is to form the horrible repast of these ravenous birds of prey. The flower of Europe in men and arms will be gathered together, and in anticipation of their dreadful fate this angelic summons resounds in the heavens. Thereupon John proceeds: "*And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army.*" (*v.* 19.) The beast, it must be remembered, is the head of the revived Roman empire, as has been seen in chapters xiii. and xvii., and the kings of the earth will include, if there are other sovereigns also, the monarchs of the ten kingdoms, who will be confederated under the leadership of the beast. (See chap. xvii. 11–18.) We can therefore at once understand what a huge host will be brought together by the beast and his vassal kings, a host seemingly invincible; and the object of the assembling of which must be connected with the Holy Land, as it is there they are found when Christ comes forth from heaven. It is possible, as hinted, that there may be other nations represented in the armies of the beast; for we read in chapter xvi. that the unclean spirits which proceed out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, the spirits of devils working miracles, go forth unto the kings of the earth, *and of the whole habitable world*, to gather them to the battle of that great day of Almighty God; and, further, that they will be gathered into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. (*vv.* 14, 16; see also chapter xvii. 14.)

Before going further it should be pointed out that this gathering of the nations is entirely distinct from that

found in the siege against Jerusalem at the time of the Lord's appearing, as described by Zechariah (chaps. xii.–xiv.), and in other prophetic scriptures. If the latter are under the leadership of the Assyrian, of whom we find frequent mention, especially in Isaiah, the former are marshalled, as we have seen, by the head of the Roman empire. If, moreover, Armageddon is derived from Megiddo, a place so well known in Jewish history, connected as it is with some of their brightest victories, and also with two of their saddest disasters, and means the Hill of Megiddo, these two armies might well be in Palestine at the same time, that of the Assyrian besieging Jerusalem, and that of the beast on its way to attack the Assyrian; but, as is possible, on hearing of the destruction of the Assyrian and his confederates, he proceeds to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army. Human thoughts under the inspiration of Satan were governing the objects of the assemblage of this vast army; but God, working behind the scenes, had His thoughts; and hence it is that the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies are described as being gathered together to make war against the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and His "called, and chosen, and faithful" followers. What daring audacity! And what a display of the corrupt depths of man's heart, rivalled only by what was seen in the crucifixion of Christ! Then, however, it was in outward guise a lowly Man whom they hated and rejected; now it is Christ appearing in glory, together with His heavenly army, against whom man would dash himself in the inveterate enmity of his heart. What other issue could there be than his overwhelming destruction?

"*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived*

them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh." (*vv.* 20, 21.) It will be observed that there is no conflict with almighty power. Christ "takes" these two impious instruments of Satan, and at once executes judgment, casting them alive into hell. (See Psalm lv. 15.) Two men in the Old Testament, as frequently noticed, pass alive into heaven, and these two arch-enemies of God and His Christ are cast alive into the lake of fire.* The remnant, the armies of the beast and the false prophet, are all slain with the judicial sword; and all the fowls are filled with their flesh. The pious remnant of that day, when they hear of the mighty deliverance which their expected Messiah has wrought for them, may well exclaim, in the language of Deborah and Barak, "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

* In 2 Thess. ii. we read only of judgment upon antichrist, the false prophet. The Lord is said to consume him with the spirit (breath) of His mouth, and to destroy him with the brightness of His coming. This description will include all the consequences of antichrist being cast alive into hell.

CHAPTER XX.

IT may be well to recall that the events of this chapter form part of a continuous narrative, which commences with chapter xix. 11, and closes with xxi. 8. The binding of Satan therefore follows immediately upon the judgment visited upon the beast and the false prophet, together with their armies, as described at the close of chapter ~~xix.~~ xix. "*And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.*" (*vv.* 1–3.)

It should be carefully noted that this is not the final judgment upon Satan—that is found in verse 10; but it is the effectual curbing of his power by his removal from the scene as introductory to the establishment of the kingdom. When the Lord was about to cast out the demons from the poor Gadarene "they besought Him that He would not command them to go out into the deep." (Luke viii. 31.) The word "deep" in this scripture is that which is given in our chapter as the "bottomless pit," literally, in both places, the "abyss." There Satan will be bound and entombed, that, during the reign of the glorious Messiah, man may not be exposed to his

deceitful influences and power. Cast down from heaven to earth, as seen in chapter xii., he will be expelled from the earth, and thrown into the abyss, where he is bound as a slave by the mighty hand of the angelic executant of the divine will. Two things in the description may arrest our attention. The dragon of this book is the old serpent of Genesis, as well as the devil and Satan of the other books of Scripture. It is the enemy of God and of man, and especially of God's people, as expressed by Satan (the adversary) and the devil (the slanderer). He is both a murderer and a liar, and has ever been so from the beginning. (John viii.) What a mercy it will be for this poor world to be delivered for a season from such a foe! And how vast the moral change thus introduced in connection with the last trial of man under the righteous reign of Christ!

It is also to be remarked that not only is he bound and shut up, but a seal is set upon him; that is, as we understand it, a seal is set upon the mouth of the abyss. If God seals there is no power on earth or in hell that can break it. After that the body of our blessed Lord had been deposited by the pious hands of Joseph and Nicodemus in the sepulchre, Satan instigated his servants to make the sepulchre sure by "sealing the stone, and setting a watch." (Matt. xxvii. 66.) Impotent attempt! for he had to do with the Son of the living God. But he himself is now in the omnipotent hands of the One whom he had thus sought to detain in the grave, and must there remain until he shall be loosed again for a brief space, to prove anew what man is even in the presence of divine goodness, administered under a perfect government, expressed in every kind of favour and earthly blessing.

The era of the thousand years is now presented: "*And*

I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [*I saw*] *the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and* [*those*] *which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*" (*v.* 4.) The first thing that attracted the attention of John was the thrones and they that sat upon them. In Daniel the thrones are introduced, but only the Ancient of days is seen as seated;* whereas here, although we know from chapter xix. that Christ is the supreme and central figure in the scene, those who sat on the thrones are chiefly indicated. But even these are represented by the word "they," and the question therefore at once arises, Of whom does John speak? Following the narrative back, it will be perceived that the "they" can only refer to the "armies" which followed Christ out of heaven (chap. xix. 14), who, as already seen, are composed of the saints represented by the twenty-four elders of this book, the saints of all ages up to the coming of Christ, albeit the church is most prominently displayed. (Chap. xix. 7–9.) On earth they had in their various degrees suffered with Christ, and now the recompense of grace is vouchsafed to them of reigning with Him. They are therefore beheld upon thrones, and as Christ's first act in connection with the establishment of His kingdom will be judgment, they share in its exercise. (See 1 Cor. vi. 2; Jude 15.)

But there are two other classes joined with those who

* This scripture is obscured in our translation by the rendering, "I beheld till the thrones were cast down." (Chap. vii. 9.) It should be given, as in the *Revised Version*, "Till thrones were placed." It is so rendered also in a well-known French version, "Je vis jusqu'a ce que les trônes furent placés."

had been symbolized by the twenty-four elders: those who had been martyred during the rule of antichrist, and those who had refused his behest to worship the beast or his image, and to receive his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands. These would be mainly of the faithful remnant described in the Psalms, who, under the frightful terrors and persecutions during the iron despotism of this man of sin, maintained their faith and hope in God, and waited for the coming of the Messiah. They lost everything on earth through their fidelity to God, "for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," and now they obtain the glorious recompense of the first resurrection, and of association with Christ in the glories of His kingdom. They "lived and reigned" with Christ a thousand years, and if our interpretation of these two classes who are added to those who had been caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, be correct, the first would be raised and the second changed after the pattern of the two similar classes in 1 Thess. iv.

Their special place and reward are emphasized by the following statement: "*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*" (*v.* 5.) In what plainer language could the pre-millennial return of Christ with His people, to take His kingdom, to reign over the earth during the thousand years, be stated? Or how could the truth of the first resurrection, as distinguished from the final resurrection of unbelievers, be more distinctly unfolded. It is only an inconceivable perversity that can seek to contend for a "resurrection of spiritual principles." If, indeed, this simple and unambiguous language be thus explained away, it would be impossible to maintain the truth of the great white throne and the final judgment

at the end of this chapter. Take the scripture as it stands, and all is plain, as well as in complete harmony with the dispensational teaching of the whole book.

Before proceeding with the description the Spirit of God turns aside to pronounce, as it were, a eulogy upon these favoured saints: "*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*" (*v.* 6.) All such are blessed indeed (see chap. xiv. 13), and they are holy, conformed now to the image of Christ, and thus answering to the claims and nature of God Himself. As risen out of death, or changed, and mortality swallowed up of life, they are for ever beyond the region of sin, death, and judgment; and it is therefore added, that on them the second death, God's just penalty upon the unbelieving and impenitent, will have no power, no title or right; for the last enemy, death, has for them been for ever destroyed. Moreover, they will be associated with Christ in His royal priesthood, and thus as priests they will enjoy access into the immediate presence of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him a thousand years. Having, through grace, overcome the power of Satan through the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony—and they loved not their lives unto the death—they are now exalted into the enjoyment of this glorious recompense. Well might the apostle say, when speaking of the glorious prospect of the believer, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in [or "in respect of"] us." (Rom. viii. 18.)

From verses 7–10 we have the account of the loosing of Satan, his last permitted activity, and the judgment

inflicted upon him and his deluded followers. The character of the reign of Christ throughout the thousand years is not found in this scripture; for that the reader must search the Old Testament, especially the Psalms and the Prophets. Here the millennium is introduced upon the completion of the first resurrection, and immediately after the statement that those who have part in it reign with Christ a thousand years, it is added, "*And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*" (*vv.* 7, 8.)

During the whole period, therefore, of the reign of Christ over the earth Satan is confined, and men will be free from his temptations. The nations will have the same evil nature as ever, but man's adversary will not be present to entice, to waylay, and to entrap him into sin. What an immense change! Now, all the influences of the scene are against, then, all will be in favour of, the Lord's people. Now the temptation is to depart from God, then it will be to profess allegiance to His Christ. At the close of this happy period, during which all kings will fall down before THE KING, and all nations serve Him, God will once more demonstrate the incurable evil of man's heart by permitting, through the loosing of Satan, one last and final trial. Nations in every quarter of the globe are deceived, spite of the manifested glory of earth's rightful Sovereign. As man had rejected Him in His humiliation he now rebels against Him in His glory. Several traces of these rebellious nations are found in the Old Testament. We read in Psalm xviii., "As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall yield feigned

obedience." (Margin, *v.* 44; see also Ps. lxvi. 3, lxxxi. 15.) As when some mighty conqueror subdues a country the people submit to his rule through fear of his power for vengeance, so will it be when Messiah establishes His kingdom. Striking through kings in the day of His wrath (Ps. cx.), His enemies, through the greatness of His power, will proffer their submission (Psalm lxvi. 3), lest they also should be destroyed. When therefore Satan is loosed, with rebellion in their hearts, they fall an easy prey to his devices, and, listening to his voice, they allow themselves to be gathered together as the sand of the sea for number, under his leadership, to earth's last battle.* Drawn together, Jerusalem, as so often in the history of the earth, is the point to which they converge, and the object of their attack. "*And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.*" (*v.* 9.)

A remarkable feature of the case is, that Christ Himself is not seen in this conflict. The kings of the earth and their armies gather together, as seen in the previous chapter, to make war against Him; but now the object of their hostility would seem to be the saints and the beloved city. It is God in heaven who is here displayed as the Defender and Avenger of His people; for "*fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*" (*v.* 9.) So perished the enemies of God's Christ and His people; God arose, and

* The reader must not confound the Gog and Magog of verse 8 with "Gog, the land of Magog," of Ezekiel xxxviii. The latter refers, as can easily be demonstrated, to Russia, the Russia of the future; while Gog and Magog in the former indicate, as stated, the nations in the four quarters of the earth. There is another difference. The invasion of the land by Gog in Ezekiel is immediately after the establishment of Messiah's kingdom; whereas the apostasy of the nations in our scripture takes place at the end of the thousand years.

they were utterly and for ever destroyed. Last of all, Satan that deceived them receives his final doom; he "*was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*" (*v.* 10.)* It was the dragon —that is, Satan—who had given the beast "his power, and his seat, and great authority" on the earth, who had inspired the false prophet (and the three together had formed a mock trinity of diabolical evil), and now we are permitted to behold them submerged in one common woeful doom. God thus in His righteousness vindicates His throne, and the throne of His Christ, and reveals at the same time the sure and certain retribution that must overtake all who persist in their enmity to Him and to His beloved Son.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE.

(Chapter xx. 11–15.)

The judgment described in this scripture forms the conclusion of all God's ways with man. The kingdom of Christ on earth has been brought to a close; all enemies have been put under His feet; the devil himself has received his final doom; and there remain only the wicked and unrepentant dead to be dealt with, before the introduction of the new heaven and the new earth. It is this last session of judgment that John here portrays: "*And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.*"† (*vv.* 11, 12.)

* As bearing on the question of the duration of future punishment, we cannot forbear calling attention to the words here employed. They are *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*—"*unto the ages of the ages.*"

† The word "throne" must, it is generally acknowledged, be substituted in the text for "God."

The character of the throne itself is the first thing to attract the attention. It is said to be "great"—great, either as befitting the dignity of the Judge, or as suited to the magnitude of the judgment; and it is also given as "white." It is not here, probably, the colour known as white—as, for example, white linen—but rather, as the word really signifies, clear or bright; that is, the "whiteness of light."* This is the expression of the dazzling purity of holiness, whether of the Judge Himself, or of the standard on which His judgment would proceed; for everything connected with Him, the throne on which He sits, or the sentence He pronounces, must be in accordance with what He is in His own essential nature. Who the Judge is, is not here stated, although John saw Him that sat upon the throne; but we know from other scriptures that it is Christ; that the once rejected Jesus, the Son of God, is He into whose hands all judgment has been committed. (See John v. 22–29; 2 Timothy iv. 1, &c.) As everywhere, indeed, in this book, it is He who ever makes good God's character in government as against evil; and here, as this scene shows, against those who have died in impenitence, as well as against the living rejecters of His authority. The awful nature of this judicial session is revealed by the statement that the earth and the heaven fled away from the face of the Judge. In what manner they disappear we learn elsewhere (see 2 Peter iii. 10–12); the fact only is here stated; and it is given to teach the final character of the judgment. What a close to the history of this poor earth! And what a contrast to the record in Genesis i., when God looked upon His new work day after day as it sprang forth from His creative hand

* A comparison of Matthew xvii. 2 with Mark ix. 3 shows that this, too, was the whiteness of our blessed Lord's garments in the transfiguration.

and pronounced it very good! And to enhance the solemnity of the scene, it may be recalled that He who sat on the throne, in John's vision, is the One by whom all things were created; and now this poor defiled earth, and the heaven that belongs to it, the witness of, and the sharer in, its defilement, are seen fleeing from His face!

Before the judgment commences, therefore, time is no more. The times and seasons have for ever passed (Genesis i. 14), and the great white throne is raised in eternity; and it is connected, as will be hereafter seen, with the destruction of the last enemy, death, as introductory to the blessedness of that eternal state in which God is all in all.

The dead only, it is plainly stated, appear before the great white throne. Already, in many acts, the living have been judged; and hence, for instance, the judgment of Matthew xxv. 31–46 belongs to another period. The living are judged at the appearing of Christ and during His kingdom, and consequently only the dead remain. And yet, it may be necessary to affirm, not all the dead. As we have pointed out in chapter xix., an immense army follows Christ out of heaven, and this is composed, as there explained, of all the saints who in every age and dispensation had died, and who had participated in the first resurrection, and of those who, living on the earth at the time of the Lord's return, had been changed and caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air. During the thousand years (chapter xx. 3, 4) there are no deaths, except of rebels against the authority of Christ. The conclusion then, as also from the scriptures before us, is irresistible, that only the wicked, the unconverted dead, are seen in this judgment. There is therefore no foundation in Scripture for the popular conception of a general

judgment—for the teaching, so prevalent in religious books, that all alike, the saved and the unsaved, are reserved to be judged at the same time. Such a thought could only spring from ignorance both of the word of God and of the nature of redemption.

All the vast multitude of the unregenerate dead, from the earliest ages down to the termination of the kingdom of Christ on earth, will be raised by the mighty power of God, and be brought before the great white throne to receive the award of their eternal doom. And to show that not one sinner who has ever passed away, wherever he may have died, shall escape, it is added in verse 13, "*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell* [*hades*] *delivered up the dead which were in them.*" At the mighty voice of the Son of God, just as the fish came at his bidding into the nets of His disciples, and Lazarus came out of his tomb, so will all this countless throng "come forth" out of their graves, or from their last resting-places, unto the resurrection of judgment. (John v. 28, 29.)

We have, in the next place, the principles of the judgment: "*And the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is* [*the book*] *of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*" (*v.* 12.) Again we read, "*And they were judged every man according to their works.*" (*v.* 13.) The first ground of judgment then is the actual works, the deeds of every soul while living on the earth. And, let it be remarked, that positive evidence as to these is adduced from the "things which were written in the books." All the "works" of men are therefore recorded, and recorded by Him, before whose omniscient eye the nature of every action is revealed. Deeds long since

forgotten, sins which, apparently trivial in human estimation, have faded away from the memory, all will be produced as the ground of condemnation. Not only so; but the book of life will also be opened, and if the names of those arraigned before this solemn tribunal are not found in it (*v.* 15) the sentence is passed, and the judgment executed. There are thus two kinds of evidence—positive and negative, both condemnatory, and both alike precluding all ground of appeal.

In connection with this, it is worthy of notice, as illustrative of God's ways in judgment, that He, while answerable to none, is ever careful to vindicate, even in the eyes of men, the rectitude of all His judicial acts. When thus He was about to destroy Jerusalem, through the instrumentality of Nebuchadnezzar, and to send His people into captivity because of their persistent transgressions, He was careful first to present the bill of indictment to prove their guilt. (See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 11–21.) So here before the great white throne, unmistakable proofs of the guilt of those on trial are shown from the "books" of works; and then, as a conclusive demonstration of their having no title to be spared, it it is added that their names were not found written in the book of life. Thus every mouth will be stopped, and will have to confess that He who sits on the throne is justified when He speaks, and clear when He judges.

The doom of this countless throng is next revealed: "*And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.** *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*" Taking it in the order given, we have, first of all, in figurative language, the destruction of death and hades. (Compare

* Most editors add here the words, "Even the lake of fire."

Hosea xiii. 14.) The meaning is, that the power of both will be for ever abrogated under the judgment of God. Death had held its sway over all these souls. Their bodies had been until now in corruption, but called out of their graves for this resurrection of judgment, death could claim them no more. When the saints are raised, death for them is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. xv.); but here there is no victory, for the hitherto prisoners of death receive the same sentence as death itself, both being condemned to the same final doom. The last enemy, death, is thus destroyed. Hades, the prison of the spirits of the dead, shares the same fate, for it has no further use in God's economy. Defiled by the character of those it had detained as captives, it passes away to the punishment of the defiled, the judgment of the eternal fire.

The nature of this judicial doom is explained to be the second death. The first death pronounced, as the penalty on Adam's transgression, meant far more than the death of the body. The moral use of the word in the phrase "dead in sins" proves beyond a doubt that it signifies, in its essence, the separation of the soul from God, together with the state of the soul as being without a single movement of life towards God. This interpretation is confirmed by the statement in Romans, that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"; for it is clearly the state of man which is thus indicated. (See also 2 Cor. v. 14.) This, rightly understood, throws great light upon the term here employed—"the second death." "Death," then, will keep its meaning—the absolute separation of the soul from God, its total exclusion from the source of all light and life, and its confinement for ever in the region of darkness; for as light and life, so darkness and death are in their very nature indissolubly connected.

Then we have the additional element, "the lake of fire." "Fire" in Scripture is the symbol of the holiness of God as applied in judgment. This may be easily traced through the various books of the Bible, as, for example, in the fire that consumed the sacrifices, and, as again, in the statement that "our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. xii. 29.) The second death therefore is the moral exclusion of the soul for ever from God, or rather, it should be said, the separation of the *whole man* (body, soul, and spirit) from God, under the infliction of His judicial wrath. This is the lake of fire, God's eternal judgment, according to the standard of His own immutable holiness, as visited upon those who refused His grace, rebelled against His authority, and chose death rather than life. It is into this "lake of fire" that every unconverted one, as this scripture plainly teaches, will be, if dying impenitent, finally cast; for it is there that all this multitude find their doom.

Nothing is said here as to the duration of the lake of fire; but, as has been seen in verse 10 of this chapter, and as many other scriptures indubitably teach, there is no ground whatever for supposing that it is less than eternal. Prophets prophesy smoother things, and dreamers dream according to the imagination of their own hearts; but the word of God abides, and it teaches that the punishment of the wicked, as the blessedness of the saved, is for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ETERNAL STATE.

(*vv.* 1-8.)

AFTER the solemn scene of eternal judgment, unfolded at the close of the preceding chapter, a vision of the unclouded beauty of the eternal state of blessedness is displayed before our eyes. The contrast is as abrupt as magnificent. No sooner had John recorded the doom of those who appeared before the great white throne than he proceeds: "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*" (*v.* 1.) Isaiah is the first to make mention both of new heavens and a new earth. He says, speaking in the name of Jehovah, "Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." (Chap. lxv. 17.) And again, "As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain." (Chap. lxvi. 22.) While, however, the words, new heavens and new earth, appear in the prophecy, it is yet evident, from the context of the passages cited, that they do not contain the same significance as in our chapter. In Isaiah, indeed, scarcely more is meant than that the heavens and the earth shall be morally new during the millennium, that, as the heavens will be cleared from Satan and Satan's power (see Eph. vi. 12; Rev. xii. 10, etc.), and the earth will be freed

in large measure from the effects of the curse (see Psalm lxvii. and lxxii.), they will be in this sense new. The apostle Peter supplies the link between Isaiah and Revelation. Taking up, as led of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah's prophecy, and giving to it a deeper meaning, he says, after describing the dissolution of all things, "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter iii. 13.) This, as will be at once perceived, goes much further than the kingdom during the thousand years, the characteristic of which is that righteousness will reign (see Psalms xcvi.–xcix.; Isaiah xxxii., etc.); inasmuch as Peter speaks of a scene wherein righteousness shall *dwell*. This could be no other than the eternal state, telling of a scene without and a scene within which answer to all that God is, a scene which is in fact the consummation of the new creation.

The first heaven and the first earth are thus for ever displaced;* and it is specially noted that there was no more sea. This fact may have a twofold significance. The first and most prominent thought is, since the sea interposes a barrier to intercourse, that there will be then no more separation. Then, as we remember the symbolic meaning of earth and sea in this book, that the earth speaks of ordered government, and the sea of insubject and unorganized masses of people or nations, it teaches, that every part of the new earth will be in ordered subjection to, and under the governmental control of, God. All will be the perfect expression of His own will; and then will be fulfilled that far-reaching petition in the prayer the Lord taught His disciples, "Thy will be done

* In fact, as we learn from Peter, they will be destroyed by fire. (2 Peter iii. 10–12.)

in earth, as it is in heaven." It was so done by our Lord Himself; but in these "new and blessed scenes," it will be also so done by every one among all the countless throng of the redeemed.

Another event is now introduced: "*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*" (*v.* 2.) It may be necessary to point out at once, for the sake of those who have not hitherto considered the subject, that the scene in verse 10 of this chapter is prior, by the thousand years, to this in verse 2. This will be more fully explained when verses 9 and 10 are reached; but it may be said now, that in verse 10 John sees the "holy city, Jerusalem" (as it should be read) in her millennial glory, and in relation to the millennial earth; whereas in verse 2, the millennial kingdom has for ever passed away, and the "holy city" is seen descending from the position occupied during the kingdom, to take up her appointed place on the new earth, of which verse 1 speaks. It is the "holy city," holy according to the nature of God (compare Eph. i. 4); and it is "new Jerusalem," not the old described in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul speaks of it in Galatians as "Jerusalem which is above," and as "our mother."* It cannot be doubted, moreover, that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews refers to the same city, when he describes Abraham as looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Chap. xi. 10; see also *v.* 16.) It is thus a figure of the church, the church as seen from the next verse, as the tabernacle of God, God's habitation through the Spirit as known even now. (Eph. ii. 22.) Three things are predicated of her: her origin is "from God"; she comes

* So it should be read, and not "the mother of us all."

"out of heaven," she is heavenly in her character;* and she is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The marriage of the Lamb has long since taken place, and then His wife made herself ready; but, notwithstanding the centuries that have elapsed, she is still seen arrayed in all her bridal beauty, as much without blemish or wrinkle, and as holy, as on the day of her presentation to her glorious Spouse.

Together with her descent to the new earth, John hears "*a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them,* [*and be*] *their God.*" (*v.* 3.) There are then three things; the tabernacle, the men, and the relationship which God sustains towards the one and the other. The tabernacle is the holy city; and the holy city, as already explained, is the church; and, inasmuch as it is God's tabernacle, it is presented to us as His dwelling-place. The reason for the use of the term tabernacle will be afterwards seen. Then there are men, and these are all the saved from Adam down to the first coming of the Lord, and all the saved from the rapture of the saints, as described in 1 Thess. iv., until the close of the thousand years; and these have the blessed position of being God's people, of having God with them, and having God as their God. They are not, as the church, the dwelling-place of God, but their place and blessing are as perfect in their relationship as are the church's in hers. There are differences which God in His sovereignty has been pleased to make, but all these are but illustrative of His own perfections and grace; and all the redeemed, whatever their special relationships, will be

* Compare 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, as to the resurrection body, the body believers will receive in the resurrection.

eternally blessed, according to God's thought, in the several positions in which by His grace they are found.

There is a special reason for the use of the word tabernacle in this place. The tabernacle was God's first dwelling-place on earth amongst His people Israel, after their redemption out of Egypt. "Let them make me a sanctuary," He said to Moses, "that I may dwell among them." (Exodus xxv. 8.)* The tabernacle was erected, and, as we find in the first chapters of Numbers, the tribes were arranged round about it, Jehovah's dwelling-place forming the centre of the encampment. While still in the wilderness, giving instructions concerning their conduct when His people should be in the land, Jehovah gave this promise, a promise conditional upon their obedience, "And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." (Lev. xxvi. 11, 12.) This promise, owing to Israel's transgressions, was never entirely fulfilled; and hence it is repeated (for God never allows His purpose to be frustrated) through Ezekiel, and applied to the time of Messiah's kingdom during the millennium: "My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." (Ezek. xxxvii. 27, 28.) Coming to our scripture, we have the reproduction of almost the same words, only now not in the form of promise, but as a statement of fact and accomplishment. Connecting the three scriptures we learn, therefore, that

* We do not cite Exodus xv. 2, as there is considerable doubt as to the exact reading. The first thought of the sanctuary came from Jehovah Himself.

it was ever God's thought to surround Himself with His redeemed people; also, that His tabernacle was a figure of the church as His habitation through the Spirit; and, finally, that the encampment in the wilderness, and the sanctuary during Messiah's glorious reign—which He Himself will build (Zech. vi. 12, 13), even as He is now building the church (Matt. xvi.)—are but foreshadowings of the eternal state, as portrayed in this scripture.

In the next place John describes the eternal consolations of the redeemed: "*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*" (*v.* 4.) Speaking exactly, this language applies to the "men" of verse 3. The church forming the tabernacle is not in view save as the dwelling-place of God, but as such in the enjoyment of her own special blessedness. Two things may be noted in this description. It is God who wipes away all tears from the eyes of His people. The tears recall the sorrows of the pilgrim life; and now God Himself, in His infinite grace and tenderness, wipes them away from their eyes—a figure of the eternal consolation ministered to them by God Himself. Then, secondly, death, and all the trials, pains, and griefs associated with human life in this world are gone, for ever abolished. Sin has now been taken away (John i. 29, Heb. ix. 26)—the final result of the death of Christ on the cross; and hence death, together with all the other bitter fruits of sin, is removed from the scene, swallowed up in the victorious scene of life. It is not the positive side of eternal blessedness, but the negative. But where is the heart which is not relieved at the glorious prospect of freedom for ever, in the immediate enjoyment of the presence of God, from all

the burdens that often bow us to the dust while treading the sands of the wilderness?

The last clause of verse 4 may be considered in connection with what follows: "*And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.*" (*v.* 5.) In 2 Cor. v. 17 we read, "If any man be in Christ, [there is] a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* The correspondence between these scriptures cannot be unobserved. The difference is that in 2 Cor. v. the old things have passed away, and all things have become new *for faith*, whereas in our scripture the change is actually wrought, the former things having disappeared for ever. In 2 Cor. v. all who are in Christ belong to the new creation; they are by faith introduced into this sphere—the sphere where Christ is as its Head, Centre, and Glory. In Revelation the old creation has for ever passed out of existence, and only the new remains. We wait for the latter; but it must not be forgotten that it is the privilege of the believer to anticipate this glorious scene—yea, even now to dwell in it—as well as to expatiate amidst its blessedness, inasmuch as in Christ he belongs to, and is himself a part of, it.

Thereon we read, "*And He said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful.*" (*v.* 5.) This command must, we judge, be regarded as accomplished before the record of the following words: "*And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*" (*v.* 6.) "It is done" may refer to the conclusion of the revelation, the natural close after the exhibition of the eternal state. It is the completion of

* Some prefer the reading, "New things have come." The authorities are divided.

the scene, followed by the solemn affirmation of the eternity of God. He is the commencement of all existence, and He is the end; and all duration is embraced in the two terms, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Grace still flows out; but the question is sometimes raised, Can there be still thirsty souls in eternity? This is to miss the significance of the announcement. If the words, "It is done," are preparatory to the eternal scene opened to our view, we have in addition a solemn setting forth of God's ways in grace and in judgment while this eternal state is in prospect. There are, in fact, three principles of His actings in regard to man. The first is before us: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." God is a giver (compare John iv. 10–14), and He will give to every thirsty soul; and He will give him not only of the water of life, but of the fountain itself; for the announcement is made in view of the full issue of receiving it, viz., eternal satisfaction and blessedness. And, lastly, He will give it freely, gratuitously —without money, and without price. Truly our God is the God of grace!

We have next, "*He that overcometh shall inherit all* [rather, these] *things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*" (*v.* 7.) All God's people must be overcomers, for they are passing through a hostile world, and are exposed to all the arts and malice of a powerful adversary. We have a glimpse of a faithful remnant in conflict in a former chapter, and of them it is said, "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." (Chap. xii. 11.) As to the world, John writes, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John v. 4, etc.) In these two scriptures

are given the means of victory; and in the passage before us we have encouragement ministered, while engaged in the conflict. First, the overcomer shall inherit these things, all these forms of eternal blessing unrolled before our eyes; and, moreover, God will condescend to enter into relationship with him: "I will be his God, and he shall be my son," and this, as it is again the final issue of the wilderness path, in its full apprehension and enjoyment. Such will be the eternal tie existing, according to the good pleasure of His will, between God and him that overcometh. Finally, the various classes are enumerated, in their moral aspects, who will not only be for ever excluded from this blessed and eternal portion, but also whose part will be "*in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*" (*v.* 8.) The devil, the beast, and the false prophet have already found their doom in this place, where they "shall be tormented day and night for ever" (chap. xx. 10); and now we learn that all such as are depicted here will have their eternal home in the same prison of hopeless woe. How awful the contrast to the state portrayed in verses 3, 4!

THE HOLY JERUSALEM.

(Chapter xxi. 9–27.)

Great mistakes have been made by many expositors, on this portion of scripture, from failing to perceive that the first part of the chapter presents the eternal state, and that here the Spirit of God takes us back to a description of the heavenly city in relation to the thousand years. From chapter xix. 11, to chapter xxi. 8, as before shown, we have a consecutive narrative of events, from the appearing of Christ to the introduction of the state of eternal blessedness, wherein God is all in all. Then,

commencing with xxi. 9, a new section begins, the object of which is to set forth the glories of the bride, the Lamb's wife, the holy city, as the metropolis, the heavenly seat of administration, of the earth, during the millennial period. This will become clear to the reader as we pursue the details here given.

John thus introduces the last section of the book: "*And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.*" (*v.* 9.) It was one of these seven angels who had shown John the judgment of Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. The parallel, or rather contrast, is designed. Babylon had claimed, but falsely, to be the bride of Christ. The angel had exhibited her in her true character, and the judgment from God with which she should be finally overwhelmed. (Chap. xvii.) Consequent upon her destruction the marriage of the Lamb took place in heaven (chap. xix. 1–8), and now the true bride, the Lamb's wife, is shown in all her beauty—the expression of the thoughts of God, as Babylon had been the expression of the thoughts of man. To view Babylon, John was transported in the spirit into the wilderness—a scene of moral drought and desolation; to behold the holy city Jerusalem* he was carried away in the spirit to a great and high mountain. As Moses surveyed the promised inheritance from Pisgah, so John is permitted to behold the fulfilment of promise and prophecy in this glorious city, from the lofty eminence on which he was placed by the angel. Thence he saw her "*descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her*

* The correct reading is probably, "The holy city, Jerusalem," and not, as in our version, "That great city, the holy Jerusalem."

light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." (*vv.* 10, 11.)

Three features are marked; it was divine in its origin, and heavenly in its character; it had also the glory of God. As another has written: "It might be of God and earthy. It might be heavenly and angelic. It was neither; it was divine in origin and heavenly in nature and character. It was clothed with divine glory; it must be as founded on Christ's work." We learn from 2 Cor. v. that all these features are true also of the individual believer, in respect of his resurrection body. It could not indeed be otherwise, inasmuch as the result for the whole church is but the collective expression of what is the result for the saint of the work of redemption. Let it also be remembered, that while the glory, the actual glory, is yet future, the church is now as divine in origin, and as heavenly in nature, as she will ever be. To understand this is indispensable for the faithful occupation of her place on earth as God's witness, and for her preservation from the contaminations of the world around. It is owing, alas! to the forgetfulness of this blessed truth, that she has sought and found (we speak of the whole church), like Pergamos of old, a home in the place where Satan dwelleth.

Her light, or her shining, was moreover like a jasper stone; and hence proceeds, as may be gathered from the significance of the jasper in chapter iv. 3, from the glory of God. (Compare Isaiah lx. 1.) The word translated light, or shining, is that found in Philippians ii. 15, as applied to believers—"among whom [a crooked and perverse generation] ye shine [or rather, appear] as lights in the world." It is the word used of the heavenly luminaries; and we therefore learn that what believers should be now morally, the holy Jerusalem will be

actually in the coming age; and that all the light in testimony that proceeds now, whether from the saints or the whole Church, comes from the same divine source as the "shining" of the holy city in the future day of glory. (Compare 2 Cor. iv. 6.) And the "shining" of the holy city will be like a jasper stone, clear as crystal, transparent and unclouded, and it will illumine the earth with its bright, blessed, and perfect rays. But while the natural eye will be able to perceive it, the heart, even as now, will need to be divinely opened to receive, and bow to its blessed testimony.

We pass now to another feature: "*And had a wall great and high,* [*and*] *had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*" (*vv.* 12–14.) Before dwelling on the significance of the wall, it may be well to call attention to the recurrence of the number twelve in this description. It has the fixed meaning in Scripture of the perfection of governmental administration in man, that is, in Christ, and this in connection with Israel. Hence there were twelve tribes and twelve apostles, both mentioned here, and both connected in the words of our Lord to His disciples: "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. xix. 28.) This at once explains the force of the number twelve, and, at the same time, the character of the holy city as here presented; that the church, the

Lamb's wife, is displayed, not in her intimate relationships to Christ, as seen in Paul's epistles, but rather in connection with the government of the earth in the hands of Christ during the thousand years. Blessed and perfect as all is, as thus exhibited, it yet does not present to us the more intimate joys and affections of the Father's house, nor our highest associations with Christ in heavenly blessedness, as, for example, set forth in the promise to the overcomer in Philadelphia. And yet, who that is acquainted in any measure with Christian literature and hymnology, can doubt that the "golden city" occupies a larger place in the minds of saints than the Father's house?

The symbolic meaning of the wall will be security; and this is assured, as may be seen in verse 18, by the fact that "the building of the wall of it was of jasper"—that is, the glory of God. Clothed with, she is also protected by, the divine glory, even as Isaiah speaks, "The glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." All that God is, and all that God is in display, is the wall round about the New Jerusalem. But, as we may see further on, the wall not only encloses and secures the holy city, but it also excludes all evil; for "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." (*v.* 27; compare chapter xxii. 15.)

In the wall there are twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and written thereon the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. The gate of a city in Scripture was always the place of judgment, and inasmuch as there are twelve here, three on every side, it will denote the perfectness of the administration of justice in the government of that day. The kingdom character of this administration is denoted by the names

of the twelve tribes on the gates, and indicating also, perhaps, at the same time, that it is through Israel as a centre that the administration in government will be conducted. Twelve angels are stationed at the gates: in the dispensations previous to Christianity they were God's providential agents in His governmental order; but they are now "the willing door-keepers of the great city" which will be the heavenly metropolis of Messiah's glorious kingdom. They are therefore subordinate, in the purposes of God, to the glorified saints of which the heavenly city is formed. There were, moreover, twelve foundations to the wall, the character of which is declared by the fact that they contained the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; for, as we read in Ephesians, those who are the fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Chap. ii. 19–21.) But the mention of the twelve apostles of the Lamb shows again that the church is not here "presented as the bride, though it be the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is not in the Pauline character of nearness of blessing to Christ. It is the assembly as founded at Jerusalem under the twelve—the organised seat of heavenly power, the new and now heavenly capital of God's government."

In the next place the city and the gates and the wall are measured. (*vv.* 15–17.) The meaning of this symbolic act has already been explained in chapter xi. There is a difference, however, to be noted in the measuring rods. There it was "a reed like unto a rod"; here it is "a golden reed." In both cases the measuring betokens

owning on the part of God, with the added idea of appropriation. The thing measured is according to His mind, and He thereby owns it to be so, and claims it as His; while the measuring rod being golden will testify that it is in righteousness He thus stamps the city, its wall and gates, with His approval. The result of the measurement is given. "*The city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length, and the breadth, and the height of it are equal.*" Like the holiest in the tabernacle and the temple, it is a cube, twelve thousand furlongs on every side—the symbol of finite perfection. That it is a given perfection needs scarcely be said, inasmuch as it had its origin in the counsels of God, and owes its existence to the death and resurrection of Christ. In all its perfection and beauty, the heavenly city is the expression of the grace of God.

The measurement of the wall is an hundred and forty-four cubits, twelve times twelve; so that in every detail the governmental character of the city is exhibited, and seen as divinely perfect.

Following upon the measurement, the composition of the various parts of the city is given. That of the wall has been anticipated; it was of jasper, the symbol of the glory of God. Happy city to be surrounded with, and guarded by, the divine glory! And such will be the lot of the holy Jerusalem. "*The foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.*" (*v.* 19.) The names of the stones are then given, beginning with the jasper and ending with the amethyst. The list may be compared with the twelve precious stones on the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus xxviii.); and it will be observed that the jasper which comes first in our

scripture, is the last on the high-priestly breastplate. There may be the significance in this, that whereas the church begins with the glory in the person of the Head, it lies at the end for Israel. To speak generally, "the precious stones," as has been well said, "or varied displays of God's nature, who is light, in connection with the creature (seen in creation, Ezekiel xxviii.; in grace in the high priest's breastplate), now shone in permanent glory, and adorned the foundations of the city." Morally they exhibit, therefore, the history of souls—as creatures, then as subjects of grace taken up and put upon the heart of Christ, and finally as seen displayed in all His various beauties in the glory.

"*The twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl.*" (*v.* 21.) The symbolic force of the pearl may be gleaned from the parable in Matthew xiii.—where the church is seen under the emblem of a "pearl of great price," the preciousness and beauty of which led the merchantman (Christ) to sell all that he had, and to purchase it. The pearl speaks, therefore, of what is attractive to the heart of Christ—a beauty which, as seen in the counsels of God, ravished Him, so that He loved the church and gave Himself for it. (See Ephesians v. 25–27.) And every gate of the holy city shone with this resplendent beauty, the fruit and issue of Christ's love and His redemption work.

Moreover, "*The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*" The street represents the place wherein men walk, and it was of pure gold, divine righteousness, righteousness as suited to God's nature, as befitted the place where He dwells, even as in the tabernacle and the temple all inside the holy place and the holiest was overlaid with gold. But the gold here is pure, and as transparent

glass, speaking of fixed and accomplished holiness—a purity answering to the nature of God Himself, and, blessed be His name, a purity that could never more be defiled.

Up to verse 21, we have had the nature, character, and composition of the holy city, but so far there has been no reference to its inhabitants. The reason for this is that the saints themselves form this heavenly structure, though, as will be seen in the next chapter, they are briefly introduced to set forth the nature of their eternal blessedness. But even here their existence is implied, as, for instance, in the next verse of this scripture: "*And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*" (*v.* 22.) For as soon as the absence of any temple is stated, the thought is necessarily brought in of saints enjoying the presence of God without let or hindrance. A temple, whatever the privileges of access and worship connected with it, speaks of distance between God and the worshipper, as was the case in the temple of the kingdom. Jehovah indeed dwelt in it between the cherubim over the mercy-seat; but the worshippers remained outside while the priest was burning incense in the holy place. (See Luke i. 10.) When therefore we read that there is no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem, but that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it, we at once understand that all distance is abolished, and that the presence of God and of the Lamb, filling the whole city, is enjoyed by all in the full measure of its display. It could not be otherwise, seeing that all the saints forming the city are there, according to the purpose of God in divine righteousness, conformed to the image of His Son. The fact of there being no temple is thus the expression of the perfect blessedness of the redeemed, all of whom are now holy and without blame before God in love. (Ephes. i. 4.)

It will, however, be observed, that the highest blessedness of the saint is not indicated; for the names of God here given are those found in the Old Testament — Jehovah-Elohim, Shaddai; all that God is, as so revealed, now made good in government in relation to the earth. This at once explains why these names are employed, inasmuch as the holy city is here connected with the government of the earth in and through the Lamb during the millennium. That the redeemed enjoy another relationship, into which they have been brought by the revelation of the Father in the Son, is known from other scriptures; but this character of blessedness is confined to the saints who compose the church, and consequently will not be known in the age to come. On this account it is that the Lord God Almighty is found in this scripture; but the Lamb is also introduced as the One in whom this state of blessedness has been secured, and in whom God has been revealed, and His character made good, first in the cross, and now in the kingdom, the epoch before us in His righteous government. A comparison of this statement, that there is no temple in the heavenly city, with Rev. vii. 15, abundantly confirms the interpretation that the blessing of the Gentile multitude, however excellent, is earthly and not heavenly.

The presence of God and the Lamb fills the scene, and thus it is that John adds, "*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light* [*the lamp*] *thereof.*" (*v.* 23.) Created light, as we learn from Genesis i., is for earth; but after Adam's fall the only light morally, even for the earth, was what came from the revelation of God. The Psalmist thus wrote, "With Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light" (Psalm xxxvi. 9);

and when the Lord was down here on the earth He said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John ix. 5.) Where God is fully revealed, therefore, there could be no need of created light; and "the glory of God" is but the expression for the display of all that God is as revealed in redemption before His redeemed. The statement in connection with this, "And the Lamb is the lamp thereof," is most significant. Does it mean that while the glory of God illumines the whole city the Lamb is the medium of its display? Stephen saw through the opened heavens the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and here the glory of God and the Lamb are the beatific source of all the light that forms the blessedness of the holy city.

The next three verses are important as affording a distinct clue to the interpretation of the whole vision. Many expositors see nothing here but a description of the blessedness of the eternal state, and this view is generally adopted by popular preachers. But these verses show beyond contradiction, that the heavenly city is here presented in connection with the millennial earth; for there are no "nations" in eternity, and no "kings of the earth" to bring their glory and honour into (unto) it. If this had been observed the mistake would have been avoided, and a valuable key would have been acquired to the understanding of the dispensations. We may therefore call attention to the force of these verses: "*And the nations of them which are saved* shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall*

* The words, "Of them which are saved," have been inserted without sufficient authority.

bring the glory and honour of the nations into it." (*vv.* 24–26.) Although the words, "of them that are saved," must be omitted, the meaning will be unaltered, seeing that the nations existing during the millennial kingdom will be those that have been spared in the judgments connected with the day of the Lord, introduced at the appearing of Christ. These nations recognize that the glory of God, which streams down from the holy city, is for their blessing and guidance, and they accordingly walk by it. Morally the light which proceeds, however imperfectly, from the church in this age, is the only light the world possesses; and this fact will help the reader to understand the statement before us. To borrow language, "The city enjoys the direct light within; the world [that is, the nations], the transmitted light of glory." (Compare John xvii. 22, 23.) The kings of the earth, moreover, bring their glory and honour into (unto) it.† If we translate εἰς, unto, instead of into, the meaning will be that the kings of the earth will recognize "the heavens and the heavenly kingdom" to be the source of the authority under which they are placed, and of the beneficent blessings they enjoy under the sway of the King of kings, and Lord of lords; and they will bring of their wealth, like the Queen of Sheba when she came to Jerusalem, as offerings in token of their submissive homage. In what way these offerings will be presented is not revealed; but it is clear from many scriptures that a connection will be maintained between the heavenly capital and the earthly kingdom.

Following upon this, we are told that the gates of the

† As to the earthly city in the day of its glory, Isaiah lx. may be read with advantage, as similar expressions are there found. The periods will coincide.

city will be perpetually open, and that there will be no night. The significance of this may be best explained by a contrast. After Nehemiah had built the walls of Jerusalem, we read, "Now it came to pass when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters, and the singers, and the Levites were appointed, that I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: . . . . And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them." (Neh. vii. 1–3.) During the night, and even while there was the least trace of darkness on the scene, the gates were to be kept closed, lest evil with evil men, who ever love darkness rather than light, should steal in and corrupt the city. With the same object later on, Nehemiah, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, "commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath"; for there were servants of the enemy always on the alert to enter unawares to seduce the Jews to violate the sabbath day. In the light of this contrast we learn then, when we are told that there will be no night in the heavenly city, that there will be the absence of all evil, and hence that the gates will never be shut. As typically in the days of Solomon, there will be "neither adversary nor evil occurrent"; and thus it is not only that evil is for ever excluded, but there is also the impossibility of its ever finding entrance into that holy and blessed place.

In *v.* 26, it would seem to be the repetition of the statement in *v.* 24, which has already been considered. There is however a difference. In *v.* 24, it is the kings of the earth who bring *their* glory and honour, whereas in *v.* 26,

it is the glory and honour of the nations that are brought. The same distinction is observed in the millennial kingdom, when it says, speaking of the honour to be rendered to the Messiah, "All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him." (Psalm lxxii. 11.) Both the monarchs and their peoples will be of one mind, and will respectively own that the "heavens do rule," and will offer their willing homage to the King of kings in His glorious heavenly capital. *Now* kings and nations serve and exalt themselves; but *then*, as we read in Zechariah, "every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles"; and it may well be on these occasions that sovereigns and their subjects will present their glory and honour to the heavenly Jerusalem, thus owning their allegiance, and rendering their tribute to the exalted King of kings, and Lord of lords!

Next, we are told, "*And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*" (*v.* 27.) No doubt must be left upon the character or qualifications of those who shall enter into this city of pure gold; and hence it is put in two ways, negatively and positively, the disqualification being given in the first place, and then the absolute and indefeasible title. No one with the guilt of sin still on him, for it is sin in its manifold forms and expressions that defiles; no one who possesses an evil nature, for it is sin in the flesh which, breaking out, works abomination; and no one who is morally of the seed of Satan, who is a liar, and the father of it (John viii. 44), will ever pass through those gates of pearl. As the apostle has written, "Be not

deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.) So too, in the next chapter of our book, it is said, "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." (*v.* 15.) Those only who are written in the Lamb's book of life will have the privilege of entry, even as all whose names will not be found written in the book of life will, at the session of the great white throne, be cast into the lake of fire. (xx. 15.) This, it will be at once observed, is only the title; but there will be a moral qualification answering to the title, as stated in the next chapter: "Blessed are they that have washed their robes,* that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."† (*v.* 14.) It must necessarily be so, for the inhabitants of the holy city must themselves be holy, according to the nature of its Builder and Maker; but the title only is here given to remind us that it is due alone to grace, God's blessed and sovereign grace, that any will find themselves within these gates. It is moreover the Lamb's book of life; and this teaches us that if believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, these purposes of grace could only be accomplished in and through the death and resurrection of Christ—of Him who, as the Lamb of God, is the taker away of the sin of the world.

* This is the right reading, and is accepted by the *Revised Version*.

† Having washed their robes, according to the usage of this figure in Scripture, indicates that their practical state corresponds with their title.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PURE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE.
(*vv.* 1–5.)

THE subject of the heavenly city is continued in this chapter; but, as the reader will notice, there is a distinct feature here introduced, and this is shown by the words with which it commences, "And he shewed me." We pass, indeed, now more especially to what characterizes the interior of the city, both in relation to its inhabitants and to the nations on the millennial earth.

John thus proceeds, "*And he shewed me a pure* river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*" (*v.* 1.) The tabernacle in the wilderness was made, as we are distinctly told, after the pattern of heavenly things; and it would seem that the earthly Jerusalem also, in the coming day of her glory, will in some respects be the counterpart of the heavenly city. We thus read in Psalm xlvi., "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." (*v.* 4.) And so too Ezekiel speaks of the waters that will issue "out from under the threshold of the house eastward"; and of the fact that the waters become a river; and he further says, "And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live

* This word should probably be omitted, as it is not found in the best MSS.

. . . . and every thing shall live whither the river cometh." (Chapter xlvii. 1–9.) In both cases, therefore, it is a river of water of life; only, it must be remembered, that in the heavenly Jerusalem it is vivifying and refreshing rather than life-giving, inasmuch as all there are in the possession and enjoyment of eternal life. It proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and it will thus represent the blessed streams of grace, of life, which will for ever flow out from God and the Lamb, in the "heavenly kingdom," to gladden the hearts of the redeemed in glory. This river is secured for them through the eternal government of God on the ground of accomplished redemption; for this would seem to be the purport of the words, "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

In connection with this river of the water of life it is added, "*In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve fruits,* and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*" (*v.* 2.) A similar feature is also described by Ezekiel as marking the earthly city, "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." (Chapter xlvii. 12.)

The tree of life in the holy city is, of course, a symbol,

* The words "manner of" are omitted because they misrepresent the fact stated. It is not twelve manner of fruits, but, as the succeeding clause shows, twelve fruits, one crop gathered every month, a figure of perpetual fruitfulness.

a symbol which immediately carries us back to Eden, and which as plainly speaks of Christ. Both the trees in Paradise indeed, that of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of responsibility, as it is sometimes termed, and the tree of life, find their answer and conciliation in Christ; for it was He who took up and settled for ever, according to the claims of God's glory, the question of man's responsibility on the cross, and then, as risen out of death, became the tree of life for all His people; of life, it may be added, in a new condition, as shown out in Christ's own risen state in glory.

The tree of life then, in the heavenly Jerusalem, is Christ in glory, and Christ in glory as the life of the redeemed; and we are thus reminded that in the glorified state, even as here, the saints do not possess life independently of Christ. This is the record that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, and this will be eternally true. The character of the heavenly life, the proper portion of the saints of God, will thus remain the same; only it must be added that in our perfected condition, as entirely conformed to Christ, it will be enjoyed to the full, without let or hindrance of any kind. We shall then know what it is, in full measure, (to borrow the language of the bride) to sit down under His shadow with great delight, and find that His fruit is sweet to our taste.

The leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations. This statement very plainly teaches that the heavenly city sustains, during the millennial period, a relationship to the earth, and that the nations will receive of the healing virtues of the Tree of Life. As has been written by another, "Only the glorified ever ate the fruit of constant growth; but what was manifested and

displayed without, as the leaves of a tree, was blessing to those on earth." In some way, therefore—in what way is not revealed—grace, either mediately or immediately, will flow out from the assembly in glory. What an insight is thus afforded into the heart of God! And what an expansion is given to the conception of "the riches of His grace" even outside of the assembly!

The next three verses go together: "*And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there: and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*" (*vv.* 3–5.) Everything being constituted in the holy city according to God's righteousness, there could be no more curse; for God will repose in the whole scene with infinite delight, for all His people, through the riches of His grace, will be there according to His own mind. Curse belongs to a state of sin and transgression, and that now has for ever passed away. The reason, however, here given is in the fact of the throne of God and of the Lamb being in it, in its absolute supremacy and recognition, and thus securing in its perfect government a state according to God. God's holiness as expressed in His throne will be the eternal guarantee of the happiness of the redeemed, even as His love, and that of the Lamb, will be their eternal and satisfying portion.

It is for this reason that we pass at once in our scripture to the positive character of the blessedness of the redeemed, the inhabitants of the heavenly city. When considering the eternal state, as described in chapter xxi. 1–7, we pointed out that there it was the negative side of

this blessedness which was prominent, that is, it was rather the absence of the evils that afflict us here, that was indicated;* but here it is the positive side, what we shall do, enjoy, and be. The first thing noted is, "His servants shall serve Him." As often in John's writings the Father and the Son—here God and the Lamb—are so completely one in his mind that he does not pause to distinguish. Hence here it is "His" servants, although he had just spoken of God and the Lamb. Here then at last His servants shall serve Him. They had by His grace done it here, though very imperfectly, even according to their own standard. Unprofitable servants they had been, even when they had laboured to the utmost; for mixed motives had often contended within their hearts. But now at length, when Christ will completely possess and control their hearts, when no other object but Himself will ever be before their souls, when His will shall find in them a full and complete response, and when they themselves will not have a thought, desire, or interest outside of His own, then they will serve Him perfectly according to *His* standard, for in all their obedience and activity they will be the perfect expression of His own most blessed mind.

They shall moreover see His face. We read of Moses that the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend; and, on the other hand, David commanded respecting Absalom, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." To see the Lamb's face in glory therefore betokens intimacy of approach and the enjoyment of His presence, a place of

* We refer to *v.* 4; in the fact that the new Jerusalem becomes the tabernacle of God is a very positive aspect of the blessedness of the redeemed.

nearness as well as of honour and blessing. This of itself tells of the saints' perfected condition, even as John writes, "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." This character of blessedness has been well expressed in the following lines:

"For ever to behold Him shine!
For evermore to call Him mine!
And see Him still before me;
For ever on His face to gaze,
And meet the full assembled rays,
While all His beauty He displays
To all His saints in glory."

Also, His name will be in their foreheads. The primary thought in this characteristic feature is that of ownership; as it is likewise in the case of the followers of antichrist in chapter xiii. But there is also another thing indicated. Name, as constantly in scripture, is the expression of what a person is; and so interpreted here it will signify that full likeness to Christ will be told out on every brow, that all His redeemed will be the reflection of Himself, in accordance with the purpose of God that they should be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

It is repeated in the following verse (5th) that there shall be no night there, for all evil has been for ever done away, and together with it the darkness which is its moral symbol. Nor will the glorified need either light of the lamp, or of the sun, either artificial or created light, for the Lord God (Jehovah Elohim) giveth them light. In this state and condition there could not be a single want which the presence of their God does not meet. They will then know, what we so feebly apprehend while in the

wilderness, His all-sufficiency, that He alone is the source of all their blessedness, that with Him is the fountain of life, and in His light they see light.

Lastly, it is said, they shall reign for ever and ever. During the thousand years they will reign with Christ; but, as we know from 1 Cor. xv., at the close of that period Christ will deliver up His mediatorial kingdom "to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." (*vv.* 24–28.) It is evident therefore that the words "reign for ever and ever" cannot refer to the association of the saints with Christ in the glories of His millennial sway; but that they point rather to the eternal kingdom of God, and to the exaltation of saints as belonging to Christ, as being the Lamb's wife, in its administration throughout "the ages of the ages."

This forms the conclusion of the description of the new Jerusalem, and, in fact, of the whole book. There are warnings added, and special intimations of the relationship of Christ to the assembly, and of the church's suited attitude, and of what produces it, while awaiting the Lord's return; and these form the suited close to these solemn communications which the Lord has made for the guidance and instruction of His people whose lot is cast in dark and difficult days.

CLOSING WARNINGS AND ADMONITIONS.

(*vv.* 6–15.)

The prophetic character of these communications is shown in every possible way. In chapter xix., as we have seen, John is told, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"; and here again the angel, who was sent to signify unto John the things that must shortly come to pass (chap. i. 1), says, "I am...of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book." (*v.* 9.) It is needful to bear this in mind, in order to understand the nature of the book, and the application of the revelations made. It is because this has been forgotten, together with the fact that the church is not the subject of prophecy, that so many mistakes have been made in the interpretation of the apocalyptic visions. These closing warnings and admonitions are therefore of great importance, as affording abundant confirmation of the view taken in this exposition, that the whole of the book after chapter iii. is yet future; and as demonstrating the untenability of what is termed the "historical view," viz., of regarding all the visions up to chapter xix. as already fulfilled in past historical events, and of the consequent contention, that we have now only to wait for the appearing of our Lord as described in chapter xix. 11. This theory could not be accepted by those who understand the true character of the church as the body of Christ, and of the church's hope as given by the apostle Paul in 1 Thess. iv. 15–18. These know that the church's immediate prospect is the coming of the Lord to receive His people, and that the judgments and woes revealed in this book (whatever premonitions of these there may have been in past ages) cannot be visited upon this poor world, until

the church has been rapt away from the scene, and is on high with the Lord. To miss this distinction is to lose the true nature of the dispensations, and especially of the church period, which embraces the time from Pentecost until the coming of the Lord.

We may now with greater intelligence pass to the consideration of this portion. The exhibition of the holy city, and the blessedness of its inhabitants, having been concluded, the angel solemnly affirms the truth of his communications: "*These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets* sent His angel to shew unto His servants the things which must shortly be done.*" Three things in this short statement confirm the view already given. The names "Lord God," Jehovah Elohim, carry us necessarily back to the Old Testament ground of prophecy; and the reason is that the faithful remnant of this book, after the church is gone, will be Jewish, under law, and sustained by Jewish hopes. It is, indeed, the remnant, so often found in the Psalms, looking for the advent of their glorious Messiah, and the restoration and blessing of Zion. The same conclusion is indicated by the term "the holy prophets," and still more strikingly, if we adopt the reading mentioned, "the spirits of the prophets"; and lastly, it is expressly stated that things made known are those "which must shortly be done."

The following verse presents a point of great interest: "*Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*" (*v.* 7.) The angel speaks in verse 6; and now the Lord Himself, it being His own testimony, speaks through the lips of the angel.

* A preferable reading would seem to be "of the spirits of the prophets."

This transition from the prophet to Him, whose angel (messenger) the prophet was, is often found in the Old Testament. A striking illustration of this is found in Zechariah xi., where Jehovah takes up the word His servant was uttering, and so distinctly, that He says, "If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." (*v.* 12.) So here the Lord Himself, His communications now drawing to a close, announces His speedy return; not, if our interpretation is correct, His return for the church, but His return to the earth. For this annunciation, as we understand it, is made for the cheer and the encouragement of the suffering remnant in the period between the rapture of the saints and the Lord's appearing, during the period therefore of Jacob's trouble, and of "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Chapter iii. 10.) And it is evidently made in view of the fearful temptations and seductions which will then beset the saints to surrender their testimony; for it is added, "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." It is this that will delight the heart of the Lord, not achieving great things or rendering splendid service, but simply keeping His word, His word for that time. "Keeping" here is observing, carrying out, and this involves another sense of the word, viz., "treasuring up," and even another, "holding fast"; for it is not until the Word has been treasured up in the heart, and retained there, that it moulds the life, and is thus observed. And it may easily be perceived what an immense encouragement this message will prove to those who will be hemmed in on every side by the powers of darkness. To be assured that the Lord's eye is upon them, and that He

is speedily coming for their relief and deliverance, and that what He desires and approves, beyond all, is their fidelity to His word, will be an unceasing source of sustainment and consolation to their souls. In principle, it is scarcely necessary to say, this is applicable to saints now, although the special announcement for them is lower down in the chapter. The fact of His coming quickly is true for both the one and the other, and of His approbation, during His absence, for those who keep His sayings.

In the next place, the effect on John's mind of these divine revelations is given. "*And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See* [*thou do it*] *not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.*" (*vv.* 8, 9.) Once before John had been so overwhelmed by the visions opened out before his soul that he fell down to worship the angel (chap. xix. 10), and it might occasion surprise that he should do again what was then prohibited; but it must be remembered, as has been pointed out, that the Lord Himself had spoken in person through the angel, and the apostle might have been so absorbed with this one voice, "Behold, *I* come quickly," as to forget for the moment the medium, the angel, through whom He had spoken. But even if so, it could not be permitted; and the angel seizes the opportunity to declare his own true character, and to enforce the truth that worship is due alone to God. It is only the more wonderful, with this on record, that the worship angels crept so early into the Church, long indeed before the writing of this book. (See Col. ii.) It is possible therefore that the mistake of John, twice made, is recorded

for the purpose of condemning a prevalent practice, as also with the view of affording the plain instruction that no beings, however exalted, must ever be allowed to intrude between God and the souls of His people. Well would it have been for the church if this lesson had been remembered.

The angel now gives the closing words of his message: "*And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*" (*vv.* 10, 11.) Some of the communications made to John were not to be divulged. When, for example, the seven thunders uttered their voices, and he was about to write, a voice came to him from heaven, saying, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." (Chap. x.) Here, on the other hand, all that he saw and heard was to be recorded for the instruction of the saints down to the end; and for the reason that the time was not exactly "at hand," but "near."* In the prophetic view everything was closing up, and the end was fast approaching. It was for this reason important that all should be warned; and hence the solemn cry of verse 11. When the end arrived, and the prophetic eye already discerned it, the state of souls would be for ever fixed and unalterable. The unjust and the filthy must remain so: for nevermore would they have the opportunity of passing out of their sinful condition; and so, in like manner, the righteous and the holy would for ever retain the blessed characters they had through grace received. Would that

* The word is ἐγγύς, as in Philippians iv. 5, translated there also, in our version, "at hand," but it really means "near," or "nigh."

this divine warning, still proceeding from this page of the written word, might rouse the careless and the indifferent on every hand, and constrain them before the final close of the day of grace, to humble themselves before God, with true repentance, and with faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Himself interposes, and speaks again in His own person in the next two verses—"*And* * *behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.*" (*vv.* 12, 13.) As the warning in verse 11, so this second proclamation of the Lord's speedy coming, is in view of the end. And it is made with a twofold object—to encourage His servants, and to warn the wicked of the rapid approach of judgment. The former, however, we apprehend, is the predominant thought in the announcement, from the mention of His reward being with Him. Even this is, however, capable of a twofold construction, and the idea of recompense to the wicked, in the judgment of the living at the appearing of the Lord, must not be excluded. In the first annunciation of His coming quickly (*v.* 7), the Lord points out wherein the blessedness of His people would be found while waiting; here He encourages them with the prospect of recompense, reminding them that the day was swiftly coming when every work done for Him, every act done, and every testimony borne, should be abundantly rewarded. What unspeakable grace! First, He Himself produces in the hearts of His people what is according to His mind; then He enables them to bear witness for Him amid the moral darkness of this world; and finally He imputes to them, and recompenses, what His own grace has wrought. Blessed for ever be His name!

* The word "and" should be omitted.

Who it is that announces that He is coming quickly is now declared, and declared as its solemn affirmation and certainty. He is the One who *was* before anything had its existence, who *will be* after all created things in this scene shall have passed away, and who exists through all time and all eternity, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all existence, the eternally self-existent One, who comprehends all being in Himself, for it is in Him that all live and move and have their being. The last two titles are found in Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." (Chapter xliv. 6.) No terms therefore could more distinctly convey the truth of the Person of our blessed Lord, or more clearly assert His true and proper Deity. And the significance of this, coming immediately after the promise of His coming, will, when their eyes have been opened, be at once understood by the tried and persecuted remnant of the last days. They will learn from it that the Messiah, for whose advent they long, is Jehovah Elohim, their Lord and their God.

It may be doubted whether verses 14, 15 are spoken by the Lord Himself; they would seem rather to be a parenthesis, in which the Spirit of God calls our attention to the essential qualification for admission to the holy city, and to the moral character of those who are for ever excluded from its portals; and He does this in prospect of the speedy coming of the Alpha and Omega, which has just been proclaimed. He says, "*Blessed are they that do His commandments,* that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh*

* Few now question that we should rather read, "Blessed are they that wash their robes."

a lie." (*vv.* 14, 15.) Accepting the reading, "wash their robes," in the place of "do His commandments," our attention is once more, and for the last time, directed to the importance of being in moral correspondence with the title possessed through the precious blood of Christ. The fact then is here emphasized, that none but those who have washed their robes, will be entitled to the fruit of the tree of life, and to entrance within the holy city. All who enter must thus be blood-bought, and have their robes washed. There is danger in this day of this truth being ignored or denied; and it is well, therefore, to observe the prominence given to it in these closing words of inspiration.

And what a contrast is presented in the succeeding verse. Doubtless many a reader, even if unconverted, would object to be included in any of the classes specified. Let such an one, however, reflect that the very first word used ("dogs") comprehends all that are unclean, and that, according to the teaching of scripture, all who are not under the value of the blood of Christ before God *are* unclean. Whatever, therefore, any one may claim to be, on the ground of moral character, he has no qualification for entrance through the gates into the city, unless he has washed his robes.

THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR.

vv. 16-21.

After the parenthesis of verses 14, 15, the Lord Himself resumes His address to John, if it be not rather a new commencement, forming a solemn appendix and conclusion to the whole book. He says: "*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David,* [*and*] *the bright and* morning star.*" (*v.* 16.)

* This word ["and"] is not found in some important MSS., and, if omitted, the passage will read, "The bright morning star."

The One who had just spoken of Himself as the Alpha and Omega now introduces Himself as, "I Jesus"; and the full force of this is only apprehended when it is observed that the "I" is emphatic. It is "*I* Jesus"; that is, "*I*," the One known on earth as Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, *I* am He who has sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches; it is I who am the beginning and the end, the first and the last. It is the assertion therefore, as will also be seen in what follows, of the Deity of Him who, as down here, and as glorified on high, was, and is, known as Jesus. (See Phil. ii. 10.) This emphatic "I" is carried on in the succeeding clause: *I*, that is, *I* Jesus, am the root and offspring of David, etc.

This twofold character of presentation must now be considered: (1) *As the root and the offspring of David.* This is the character in which He will be the source of blessing to the earth, through making good all that God is, as revealed in righteousness, in government. For it is as Son of David that He will reign; but He who, as born into this world, was of the seed of David, was also He from whom David sprang, for He was also David's Lord. He, who comes to establish His kingdom, is thus also Jehovah; and hence we read, "Say among the heathen that Jehovah reigneth"; and again, "Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before Jehovah: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth." (Psalm xcvi. 10–13.) (2) *As the bright* [*and*] *morning star.* It is as such that Christ presents Himself to the church as her special portion, while waiting for His return. It is the third time that He is so named; and it will aid the reader if we briefly consider the previous passages in which this title is found. In 2 Peter we read: "We have also a

more sure word of prophecy" (the word of prophecy made more sure, or confirmed), "whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." (i. 19.) The day star in this scripture is really the morning star, as Peter uses the word which always designates it—its proper appellation, whereas in Revelation the term employed points rather to the time of its appearance. It was no part of Peter's commission to unfold the truth of the church, nor, consequently, that of the coming of Christ for His people. For him it was ever the appearing of our Lord in glory as introductory to the kingdom; and it is of this he speaks when he describes the glory, the majesty, of our Lord on the mount of transfiguration. Still he was aware of another glory, as the herald of the kingdom, which our Lord possessed as the morning star, and which would cheer the hearts of the saints, while awaiting the Lord's glorious appearing. The morning star shone, if but on the edge of the night, and as the presage of the day. Passing on to Revelation ii., we find that the Lord, in encouraging the overcomer, says, "And I will give him the morning star." The morning star shines in the heavens while the world is buried in slumbers; but the lonely watcher is cheered with its bright and silvery rays, for it tells him that the night will soon wane, and that the sun will speedily arise and introduce the day. But the believer knows something more, when he is occupied with Christ as the morning star, even that before Christ ascends the heavens, and rises upon the world as the Sun of Righteousness, he and all the saints, will be caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air, to be with Him, before His return in glory. When the Lord thus says to the overcomer in Thyatira, "I will give him the morning star," it means that he shall possess Christ

in this character, with the promise of association with Him in heavenly glory, as his sustainment and cheer amid the night of corruption that had set in among the professing people of God.

So, in our scripture, Jesus discovers Himself to the church in this aspect of His heavenly beauty, to attract her heart to Himself, to remind her that her period of waiting will soon be over, and to assure her that He is waiting, as she also is waiting, for the moment when He will present her for ever to Himself. To know Christ, then, as the bright* morning Star, the church, and individual believers, must be watchers; and just in proportion as this position is maintained, will be the joy of occupation with Him in this character.

In the next verse the effect of this presentation of Christ is given: "*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" The connection with the previous verse is of the most intimate kind. It is in fact the disclosure of Christ to the assembly, as the bright morning Star, that awakens her affections, and produces in the power of the Spirit her longing desire for His return. This were not possible, unless her relationship with a heavenly Christ had been previously known and enjoyed; but assured of her union with Him, and of her own eternal portion in His love, even while still in the wilderness, the moment she perceives Him, as so presented, the holy ardour of her affection breaks forth in the cry, "Come." Nothing could more distinctly show that the church is not of earth, but of heaven—heavenly in origin, and heavenly in character;

* The addition of the word "bright" will probably mean that, for the waiting soul, His shining will be all the brighter as the darkness deepens around.

and nothing more could more plainly reveal that the secret of waiting, waiting with desire for the coming of the Lord, is entirely a question of heart. Where the treasure is, the heart will be also; and that Christ is the treasure of the bride is seen here in the intensity of her utterance of the word "Come."

It is however the Spirit *and* the bride who say, Come; that is, the cry is produced by the Spirit in the church. She raises it, but it is He who has called it forth; and we are thus permitted to see, in this place, the church as the vessel, the willing vessel of the Holy Ghost; for it is He who directs her gaze upward to the bright morning Star, and constrains the expression of the desire for His coming. It follows that this is the normal attitude of the assembly. Moreover, everyone that heareth is invited to join in the entreating appeal. This should include every believer; for the attitude of the church should be that of the saints individually. Wherever therefore this cry is raised, every child of God, however defective his knowledge of the truth, is urged to turn his face upward to Christ, as the morning Star, and to say, Come. Would that it might be so; for it would be the sign of a blessed revival, making ready a people prepared for the Lord. The Spirit in the assembly directs her attention, in the next place, to every thirsty soul, to all who are in spiritual anxiety, and who are longing for satisfaction; and, as herself possessed of the living water, and possessing it, as the representative of Christ on earth, she invites every poor thirsty one to come, to come, drink, and be satisfied, even as the Lord cried in days of old, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." (John vii. 37.) Still more widely must her invitations go forth, or she would not be the true exponent of grace, of the heart of God; not a single soul on the face of the

earth must be omitted; and hence she cries, lastly, "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

We have thus here, as often observed, the whole circle of the church's affections, and, it may be added, of these affections in their divine order. Christ himself occupies the first and supreme place; believers individually come next; then thirsty souls are cared for; and finally sinners are invited. To borrow words: "The church can look up and say to the bridegroom, Come; she can look down or around her, and say to the thirsty soul, Come, yea, to whosoever will, Come and drink of the water of life freely. It is a most lovely picture of her whole position."

The integrity of these divine communications is now solemnly guarded and affirmed: "*For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book* of life, and out of the holy city, and* [*from*] *the things which are written in this book.*"†

The importance of these revelations could not have been more jealously protected. In chapter i. it is said, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy"; and now in conclusion the Lord Himself testifies to every one that heareth the book read, that the most fearful judgments shall fall upon the man that shall add, and so corrupt by adding, to what has been communicated; and, in like manner, if any man shall

* There is scarcely a doubt that "tree" should be here substituted for "book."

† If the word "and" be omitted in the last clause, as also the inserted word "from," the true reading will be, "the things which are written in this book"—the reference being to the tree of life, and the holy city. (*vv.* 18, 19.)

take away from it, he shall suffer the penalty of exclusion both from the tree of life and from the holy city. (Compare Deut. iv. 2, xii. 32.) The word of God is perfect, and to attempt to amend it, whether by addition or diminution, is not only to betray the folly of the human mind, but also to expose the one who attempts to do so to the just judgment of God. Rationalism in its many forms, is thus at once, and for ever, condemned. And, while fully admitting that these warning words apply to the book of Revelation, it is yet not a little significant that they occur at the close of the canon of inspiration. As God placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life, so He who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, sets His flaming two-edged sword, which also turns every way, to guard against any assault upon the perfection of His sure and holy word.

One word more, and His testimony is completed: "*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.*" Such is the last announcement of our blessed Lord; and it is a solemn affirmation of His speedy return. True that nearly twenty centuries have elapsed since these words were uttered; but this fact increases rather than diminishes their importance. They warn the church for all time that her proper attitude is that of hope and expectation, and encourage her by the assurance that the consummation of her blessedness is at hand. That she has forgotten her bright and blessed hope is only too patent; but the Lord is now seeking in many ways, and with increased urgency, to recall her to her true portion. The cry, "Behold the Bridegroom," raised many years ago, and then, alas! for a time, almost silenced, is again being sounded forth from many revived hearts. Let His people therefore both watch and pray, pray while they watch, that many who are now

buried in sleep may be awakened to the enjoyment of the same blessed hope, so that it may be apparent to all that they are waiting for God's Son from heaven. And let those who are especially connected with the testimony in these last days, be themselves so under the power of the expectation of Christ, that they may proclaim continually, as the Lord's messengers, these blessed words of consolation and hope, "Surely I come quickly."

John, used of the Spirit to express what should be the response of every true saint, replies to this closing declaration, "*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"* (*v.* 20.) When the Lord's coming in the clouds, at His public appearing for judgment, is proclaimed in chapter i., John also says, "Even so, Amen." It betokens not only a heart in subjection to Christ, but one also in communion with His mind and object. What Christ announces, John accepts as the expression of His perfect will. But there is more than this in our scripture; it is the delighted answer of his own heart to the prospect of soon seeing the Lord face to face, and of being for ever with Him. In the attitude therefore of John, as here given, is seen what should be the attitude of every believer, and what will be the attitude when Christ Himself possesses the heart's affections. We may well therefore challenge ourselves, when we read these words of the apostle, as to whether they express our own feelings and desires. It is surpassingly beautiful to behold, at the very end of the Scriptures, the attitude of Christ in relation to the church, and the attitude of the saint in relation to Christ, as so produced.

The apostle himself, as led by the Holy Spirit, concludes his work and mission with the message, "*The grace of our*

* In some Bibles, it would seem, from the punctuation, as if the "Amen" were spoken by the Lord. It is, we judge, uttered by John.

*Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.** *Amen."*† Adopting the emendation, "with all the saints," what an insight is thus afforded, as the book of inspiration closes, into the heart of Christ, indeed into the heart of God. All His saints are remembered, and it is His desire that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with them. May the hearts of God's beloved people be increasingly enlarged to apprehend and enjoy it! And may the hearts of the readers, and of the writer of these lines, never move in a narrower circle than that of God's own affections!

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

BEFORE closing our study of this book, it may be helpful to the general reader, in his further examination, to present a brief outline of its contents. After the introduction and salutation (chap. i. 1–6), the announcement of what is really the subject of the book, the appearing of our Lord in glory, as Judge of all the earth, together with the affirmation of its certainty as bound up in the revelation of all that He is as the eternally self-existent One, we have the vision, vouchsafed to John, of Jesus Christ, as Son of man, walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, surveying, judging, and pronouncing upon their condition as estimated by Him whose eyes "were as a flame of fire."

In this connection is found the key to the book, in the threefold division, which the Lord Himself communicated to John, when He commanded him to "write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (after these). (Chap. i., 19.) The things which John had seen comprise the vision

* Or rather, as many authorities prove, "be with all the saints."

† The "Amen" is omitted by some as an ecclesiastical addition.

of the first chapter; "the things which are" relate to the church period, as set forth prophetically in the letters to the seven churches (chapters ii., iii.); and "the things which shall be after these" refer to the events which will take place, after the church has been rapt away from this scene, preparatory to, and including, the returning of the Lord with His saints, the destruction of hostile powers, the millennial kingdom, the great white throne, and the eternal state; in fact, all that is recorded in chapters iv.–xxii.

In chapters ii. iii. we find a prophetic outline of the church period, the public course of Christianity as seen in this world, mingled with instructions, warnings, and encouragements for the saints of God in every age.

Chapters iv. v. have a special character as introductory to what follows. In chapter i., John was in the isle of Patmos; in chapter iv., he not only sees a door opened in heaven, but he is called up thither, that from thence, the place of the church now, the only true place of vision, he might view "the things which must be after these." God as Creator, in covenant with creation, with the twenty-four elders on thrones, surrounding His throne, the seven Spirits of God, tokens of judgment proceeding out of the throne, the sea of glass before, and the living creatures around the throne offering their perpetual praise, accompanied by the worship of the elders—such are the subjects of the chapter. But it is Jehovah as Creator that is celebrated. (*v.* 11.) In chapter v. the song is that of redemption, in which, according to their respective positions, all created things unite; and it is called forth by the introduction of the Lamb "as it had been slain," who alone, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had prevailed to open the book of God's counsels as to the earth, and to loose the seals thereof, unfold those

counsels, and in their accomplishment make good all that God is in government on the earth.

The opening of the seals is then detailed. (Chapter vi. 1–17.) After the first six there is a pause, and in chapter vii. a remnant from the twelve tribes of Israel is sealed for preservation through the judgments which are about to follow, and a multitude of Gentiles are seen as destined to be brought through the great tribulation, and to occupy a special place of blessing before the throne of God, and to serve Him day and night in His temple, while He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, and they themselves will be under the special shepherd care of the Lamb, and in the enjoyment of divine consolations. After this interval the seventh seal is opened, and is followed by the seven trumpets. (Chapters viii. 2–xi. 18.) But between the sixth and seventh trumpets the episode is introduced of the "mighty angel," with a little book in His hand, taking possession of the sea and the earth, as He utters the solemn oath, that there should be no further delay (chapter x.); and also of the measurement of the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein, together with the testimony and the death and resurrection of the two witnesses. (Chapter xi.) The seventh trumpet ushers in the end, and the world sovereignty "of our Lord and His Christ."

There are, it will be remarked, seven seals and seven trumpets. The distinction between them would seem to be that made by our blessed Lord, in Matthew xxiv., between the "beginning of sorrows," and the "tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." The first six seals introduce, therefore, preliminary judgments: these ended, there is a pause in heaven before the severer judgments, heralded by

the trumpets, and which issue in the establishment of the world-kingdom of Christ.

Before the "seven angels, having the seven last plagues," appear, several distinct, though related, subjects are interposed, in order to unfold the causes and the object of God in thus dealing in judgment with the earth and its oppressors. In chapter xii. there is "a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God." Hence we have the vision of the "woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (*v.* 1)—Israel, as seen in the purpose of God, and of the birth of the "Man child," whom the dragon seeks to devour, but who is caught up to God and His throne. War in heaven follows, and Satan and his angels are cast out into the earth, to the joy of heaven, and to the sorrow of the earth. (*v.* 12.) This event is celebrated in heaven as the earnest of the end and the establishment of the "kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ." (*v.* 10.) Satan, cast out of heaven, turns all his enmity against the woman and her seed, but they are preserved by God's providential care. In chapter xiii. Satan's two great instruments for the execution of his designs appear upon the scene—the first beast, the head of the revived Roman empire, who receives from the dragon "his power, and his seat, and great authority"; and the second beast (*v.* 11), the antichrist, who acts as prophet to the first beast, and "causes the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." (*v.* 12.)

Coming to chapter xiv. the curtain is lifted, and the Jewish remnant, the 144,000, are seen with the Lamb on

mount Sion. The issue of their suffering path is exhibited before they have passed through the time of Jacob's trouble. This scene of light and blessedness is succeeded by three angels with their several proclamations: the first preaching the everlasting gospel; the second announcing the fall of Babylon; and the third proclaiming the penalty for those who should worship the beast and his image, or receive the mark of his name. (*v.* 11.) Then, after the revelation from heaven concerning the blessedness of those who should die in the Lord "from henceforth," we have the harvest and vintage judgments. Chapter xv. opens with another sign in heaven, "seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." (*v.* 1.) But before these angels empty their golden vials, the blessed dead, referred to in chapter xiv. 13, are seen in heaven, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and singing the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb. (*vv.* 2–4.) The vials are then poured out. The reader must refer to the exposition to learn their character; but attention may again be called to two things: first, the similarity of the judgments, if intensified, to those connected with the trumpets; and to the fact that they must be, to a large extent, inasmuch as the trumpets, equally with the vials, reach to the end, contemporaneous with the trumpets.

From chapter xvii. 1 to xix. 4, we have the description and the judgment of Babylon, together with its consequences on earth. The contrariety between the mind of man and the mind of God is forcibly depicted in the universal lamentation on earth, and in the burst of joy in heaven, over the destruction of the "great city Babylon." (xviii. 9–20.)

The rest of the book is easily deciphered. There is direct sequence in the events recorded in chap. xix. 5–xxi. 8. First, the marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven;

then He comes forth on a white horse, followed by the armies which were in heaven on white horses, to victorious judgment. It is chapter i. 7 in fulfilment. His enemies, led by the beast and the false prophet, are taken and destroyed, and the two leaders are cast alive into the lake burning with fire and brimstone (xix. 20, 21); Satan is thrown, bound, for a thousand years, into the bottomless pit; those who had been martyred, and those who had resisted the seductions and the power of the beast and the false prophet, are added to the first resurrection, "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (*vv.* 4, 5.) At the close of this period Satan is loosed, and man is put to his final test. The nations are deceived, and gather themselves together once more against the Christ of God, only to be consumed with divine fire, while Satan is consigned to his eternal doom in the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are. (*vv.* 7–10.) The great white throne follows, with the judgment of all the wicked dead, and forms the close of all God's ways with man. Next we have the new heavens and the new earth, and the tabernacle of God with men—in one word, the eternal state. (xxi. 1–9.) Following upon this, we are led back to view the glories of the heavenly city in relation to the millennial earth (xxi. 9–xxii. 1–5); and then the book closes with warnings, encouragements, and exhortations, and is sealed by the announcement, "Surely I come quickly." May the reader and writer be able to respond with John, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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